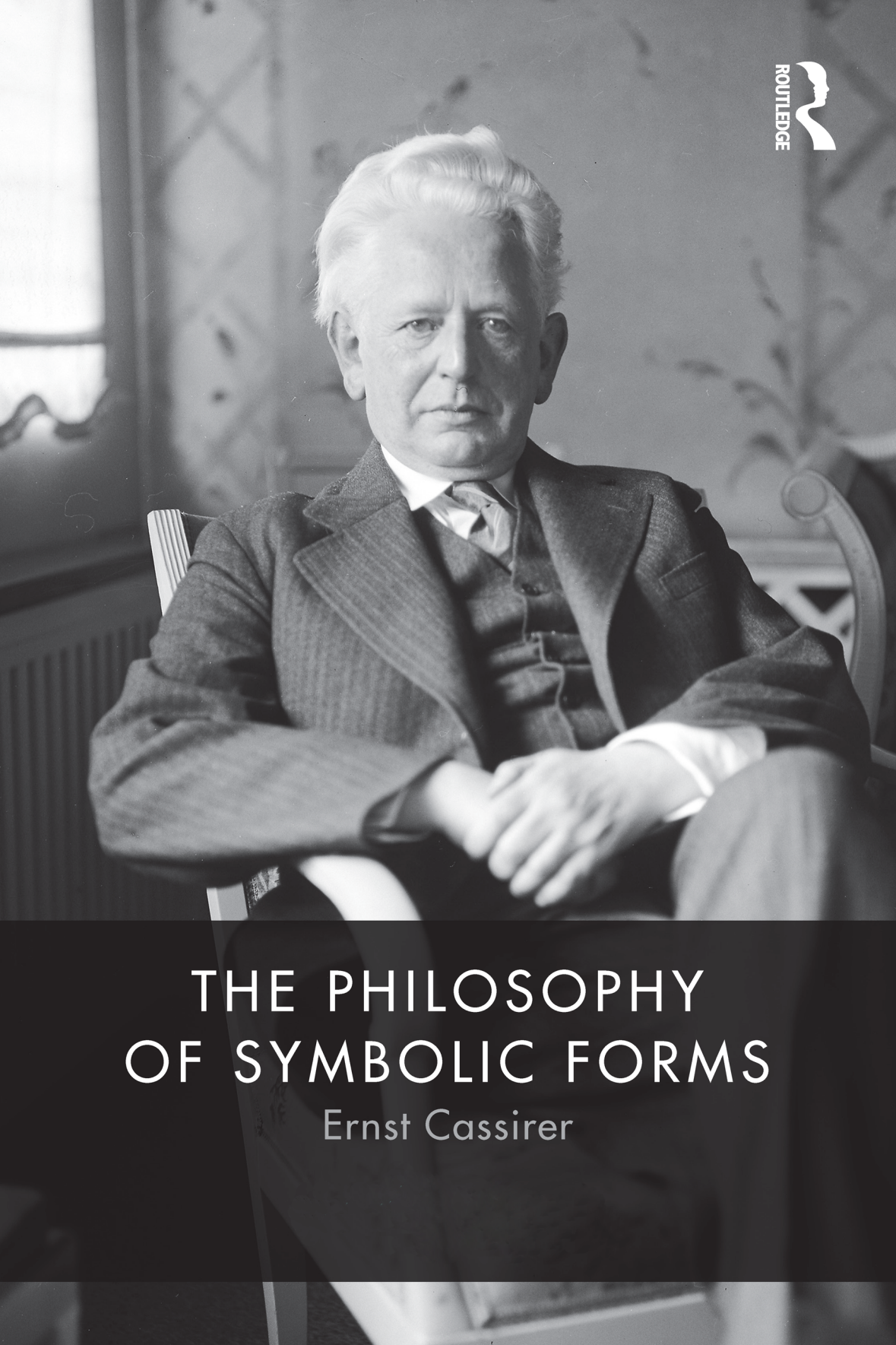
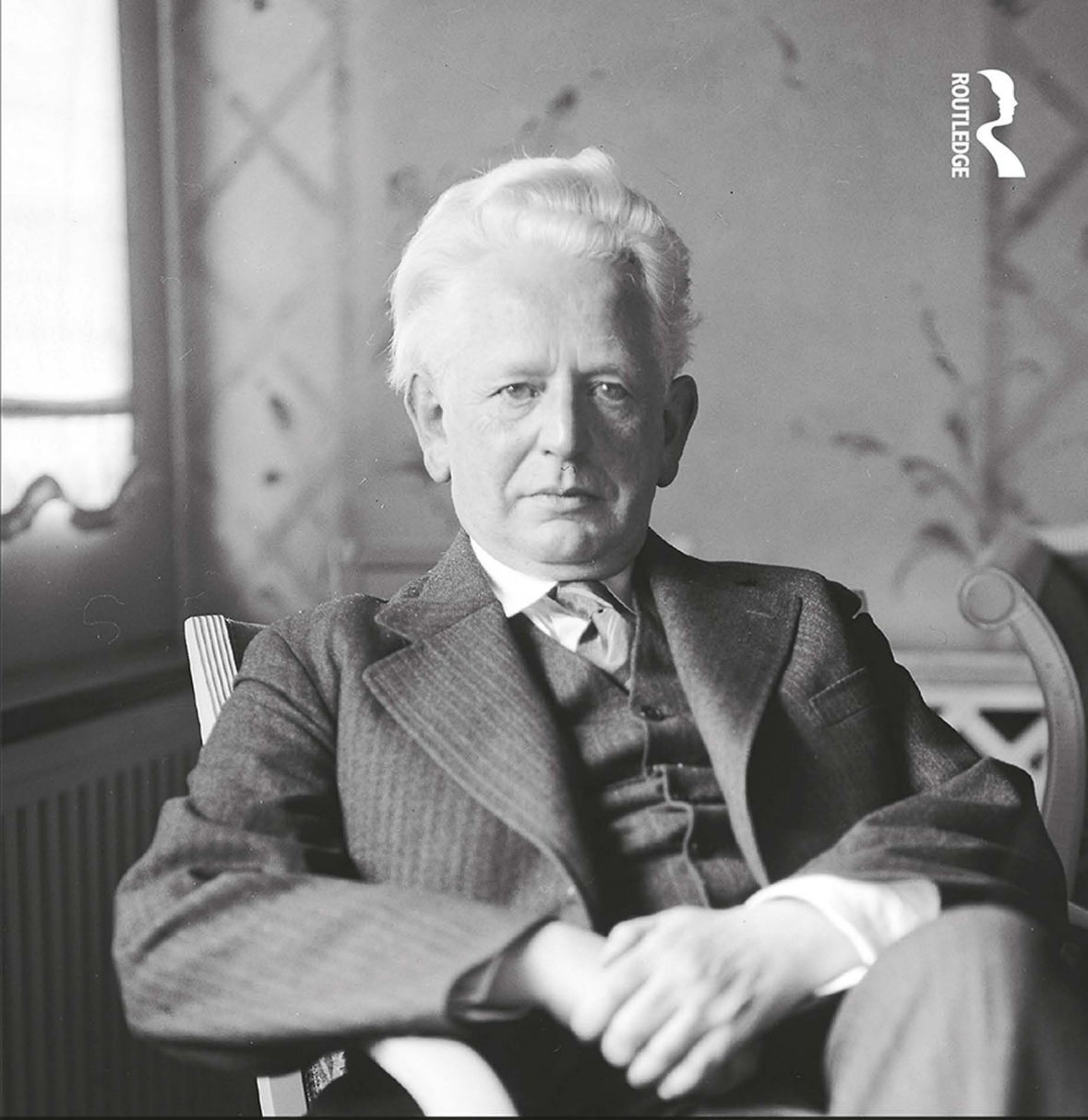


THE PHILOSOPHY OF SYMBOLIC FORMS

Ernst Cassirer



THE PHILOSOPHY OF SYMBOLIC FORMS

Ernst Cassirer

Volume 1: Language

The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume 1: Language

"*The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is a milestone in twentieth century philosophy. Promoting a philosophical vision informed by Kant, it incorporates the philosophical advances achieved in the nineteenth century by German Idealism and Neo-Kantianism, whilst acknowledging the contributions made by his contemporary phenomenologists. It also encompasses empirical and historical research on culture and the most contemporary work on myth, linguistics and psychopathology. As such, it ranks in philosophical importance along with other major works of the twentieth century, such as Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

In the first volume, Cassirer explores the symbolic form of language. Already recognized by thinkers in the tradition of German Idealism, such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, language is the primary medium by which we interact with others and form a common world. As Cassirer emphasizes in the famous Davos Debate with Heidegger, 'there is one objective human world, in which a bridge is built from individual to individual. That I find in the primal phenomenon of language.' The famous *trias* Cassirer discerns in the functioning of language – the functions of expression (*Ausdruck*), presentation (*Darstellung*), and signification (*Bedeutung*) – has become paradigmatic for accounts of language, philosophical, linguistic, and anthropological alike."

Sebastian Luft, Professor of Philosophy, Marquette University, USA

This new translation makes Cassirer's seminal work available to a new generation of scholars. Each volume includes a translator's introduction by Steve G. Lofts, a foreword by Peter E. Gordon, a glossary of key terms, and an index.

Ernst Cassirer was born in Germany 1874 in the city of Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland). He taught at Hamburg University from 1919 to 1933, and then at All Souls College, Oxford, before emigrating to Sweden and then to the United States. Through its creative interpretation of Kant's philosophy combined with a deep knowledge of the role of language and culture, Cassirer's work is regarded as indispensable to understanding the relationship between the two major traditions in twentieth-century philosophy, the "analytic" and the "continental". Cassirer's philosophy is unique, as it sought a common

ground between the scientific and humanistic worldviews which frequently divided these two traditions, exemplified in his famous debate with Martin Heidegger at Davos in 1929. His work resulted in the monumental *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* as well as several books on the philosophy of humanism and the Enlightenment. He taught at the universities of Yale and Columbia in the early 1940s and died in New York in 1945.

Steve G. Lofts is Professor of Philosophy at King's University College, Canada. He is the translator of Cassirer's *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences* and *The Warburg Years (1919–1933): Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*.

The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume 1

Language

Ernst Cassirer
Translated by Steve G. Lofts

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Foreword

Peter E. Gordon

Some works of philosophy reflect the time in which they were written, others recall an earlier age, and still others seem to anticipate a time yet to come. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has suffered the peculiar fate of a work that seemed *unzeitgemäß*, or out of tune with its time. First published in the 1920s during the brief and troubled era of the Weimar Republic, it was intended for a cultured readership that was either rapidly disappearing or had not yet appeared, an intellectual world in which the memory of German Idealism could still inspire and the last embers of European humanism had not ceased to glow. Its author, Ernst Cassirer, belonged to that distinctive stratum of the German-Jewish bourgeoisie, a small fragment of the Central European educated classes or *Bildungsbürgertum* for whom culture had become a kind of ersatz religion and who held fast to the values of Universalism and the Enlightenment even as the surrounding culture succumbed to nationalism and intolerance. Cassirer was among the hundreds of thousands of intellectuals and artists whose careers in Germany came to an end by the brutal fiat of National Socialist legislation in 1933. He fled with his wife into exile, and after two years in Oxford and a longer stay in Göteborg, Sweden, he spent his final years in the United States. Since his death in 1945, his philosophical legacy has survived in the uncertain twilight of a culture that can no longer identify with his ideals. But no work of philosophy should suffer the ignominy of being turned into a mere monument of the past. The crucial question is whether we can still read it today and, if so, how.

"The human mind," wrote Goethe, "will not be confined to any limits." Cassirer was Goethe's spiritual stepchild. His masterpiece, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, was a belated contribution to a philosophical genre that Goethe would have admired, especially for its readiness to break with academic convention by exploring all domains of human expression, from language to myth, from religion to science. Cassirer came from an accomplished family of artists and scientists: among his cousins were Richard, an esteemed neurologist, and Paul, a gallery owner and art collector who played a major role in promoting the works of the Berlin Secession and Postimpressionists such as Van Gogh and Cézanne. In his philosophy, these seemingly disparate domains are understood as stemming from a common source, the expressive capacity or formative principle that belongs to the human being as an *animal symbolicum*. For Cassirer, the mind is not a passive faculty that merely receives impressions from the external world but rather an active faculty that constitutes those impressions by investing them with order and meaning. The symbolic is the very principle of intelligibility whose powers leave nothing untouched. As it presses outward into all domains of experience, the mind comes to recognize itself in its own symbolic achievements. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is nothing less than the philosophical record of these efforts.

Cassirer came to this task well equipped with conceptual instruments that he had already honed to precision after years of philosophical research. His earlier works reflect a rigorous training in the philosophical methods associated with Hermann Cohen and the so-called Marburg School of neo-Kantianism, which first emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as a philosophical reaction against the preceding age of metaphysical extravagance. The neo-Kantians were a diverse group but united in the conviction that philosophy could only move forward only if it went "back to Kant," and this meant reconceiving philosophy as a rigorous inquiry into the transcendental conditions for objective knowledge. Thanks to the reawakening of Kant's philosophy at Marburg, Cassirer first turned his attention to the philosophical foundations of the natural sciences. He was especially keen to understand the epistemological principles of classical and modern physics, in which obsolete and metaphysical concepts of "substance" had been gradually supplanted by modern concepts of pure "function." In Einstein's theory of relativity,

for example, our basic concepts cannot be construed as mere "copies" of immediate material data; they are instead "represented as constructed projects" of our own thinking. The concept of being is replaced by the concept of order.

This insight into the epistemological revolution in modern physics first permitted Cassirer to realize the unique importance of the symbolic. In the early 1920s, Cassirer also made the acquaintance of Aby Warburg, whose unusual library at Hamburg became a kind of spiritual home and the place where he came to appreciate the richness and diversity of world culture and mythological belief. In fact, it would not be misleading to describe *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* as an attempt to provide the Warburg Library with a transcendental foundation. Here Cassirer presented his famous address, "The Concept of Symbolic Form in the Construction of the Human Sciences" (his inaugural publication for the Warburg Library), in which he laid out his definition of a symbolic form as "every energy of spirit by which the content of spiritual signification is linked to a concrete and intrinsically appropriate sensuous sign."[1] Symbolic forms serve as the common intellectual framework for all systems of human meaning – in myth, religion, language, and science – all of which bear witness to the idea that "our consciousness does not content itself with receiving impressions from the outside, rather it links and penetrates every impression with a free activity of expression."[2] When they are understood as the fruit of human symbolization, even the most "primitive" or "irrational" moments in human culture are revealed as belonging to a shared world of "self-created signs and images."

In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, this general principle serves as the point of departure for a transcendental inquiry into the most diverse forms of symbolic expression. However, we must not mistake this project for a mindless celebration of cultural diversity that would blur all essential distinctions between science and myth, reason and unreason. Cassirer is committed to a deeper and more expansive kind of rationalism – a humanism without limits. But he organizes his philosophical inquiry in a developmentalist narrative that charts the self-education of the human species. We can think of the book as an attempt to historicize the Kantian theory of form: myth can play a crucial role in the structuring of experience only until it yields dialectically to the more sophisticated symbolic

forms of monotheistic religion, and in the very same way religion must yield to the consciously self-created forms of modern science. In this narrative of symbolization, each stage is assigned a suitable role, though none of them can compromise the underlying narrative of human enlightenment. Unsurprisingly, the third volume of Cassirer's project is called *The Phenomenology of Cognition*, an implicit homage to the Hegelian idea of a phenomenology as a story of the mind's progressive efforts to achieve the fullest and most rational form of self-realization. For Cassirer, as for his German idealist antecedents, this narrative of self-realization is not only epistemological but also cultural and political: the human being comes to know itself only if it also comes to recognize itself as the author of its own fate. Cassirer's work thus implies a strong commitment to modern democracy.

Nearly a century has passed since the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* appeared in 1923, and over this broad timespan, certain features of Cassirer's work have grown antiquated and unpersuasive. For those who can no longer accept Enlightenment-inspired appeals to progress in a modern world that made Auschwitz a possibility, the evolutionist principle that underwrites Cassirer's philosophy may seem altogether intolerable. But we should not hasten to dismiss him too quickly as a thinker from a more optimistic age. At the end of his life, in his last and posthumously published study, *The Myth of the State* (1945), he acknowledged the contemporary power of modern political myths, such as those that had become official ideology in the Third Reich. He specifically warns that these myths are not organic products of the human mind; although ancient myths served proto-rational aims, the modern myths are artificial things that can be manufactured at will. It is an insight that he shared with the philosophers of the Frankfurt School, who compressed the dialectic of regression into an aphorism: "myth is already enlightenment, but Enlightenment reverts to myth." Nor should we neglect the striking affinities that connect Cassirer's philosophy of language and myth to later themes in French structuralism. A neglected line of argument runs from Cassirer's analysis of the symbolic forms of mythical thinking to the unconscious rules of totemism and myth examined by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his structuralist anthropology.

Cassirer's philosophy also anticipates a methodological perspective that we now associate with Michel Foucault. The suggestion is not as

surprising as it may seem. Foucault was quite familiar with Cassirer's work, and in 1966 he even wrote a review of Cassirer's study of the Enlightenment. That same year, he also published *Les mots et les choses* (known in English as *The Order of Things*), and readers of the book may note its resemblance with *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Both are attempts to excavate the *a priori* structures that manifest themselves in all spheres of human culture and knowledge. Moreover, both insist that these *a priori* structures or symbolic forms are not historically invariant but instead susceptible to radical changes over time. In documenting these tectonic shifts, Cassirer not infrequently characterizes them in Aristotelian terms as a "μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος," or a transition into an entirely different genus. What Foucault called an "archaeology of knowledge" involves a similar emphasis on the discontinuity between one episteme and another. Notwithstanding this remarkable similarity, however, there is at least one crucial difference: Foucault sees these *a priori* structures as *anonymous*. They appear all at once, as if from nowhere, and he has little interest in offering a metaphysical explanation for their point of origin. Unlike Cassirer, he refuses to see them as manifestations of the formative power of human consciousness, since he regards all such appeals to transcendental humanism with the deepest skepticism. The expressive model of human consciousness that serves as the grounds of Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms is, from Foucault's perspective, merely a surface phenomenon of a uniquely modern episteme that may soon disappear. This places Foucault in a difficult position of affirming structures of meaning while disavowing human consciousness as their source. With this paradoxical doctrine, Foucault takes his place in a long tradition of modern critiques of transcendental humanism that extend back at least as far as Heidegger. But we might ask ourselves whether it is plausible to speak of meaning if one does not offer some account of meaning's genesis. Adopting an attitude of knowing condescension toward seemingly obsolete doctrines of transcendental humanism is easier than supplying a worthy alternative.

This was a major bone of contention in the famous 1929 confrontation between Cassirer and Heidegger in Davos, Switzerland. If Heidegger appeared to many eyewitnesses as the victor in this dispute, this was because he was willing to abandon the doctrine of transcendental humanism that had remained a dominant fixture in modern academic

philosophy at least since Kant. Cassirer, by contrast, had little interest in surrendering this doctrine, since his entire philosophy was premised on the notion that symbolic forms are the manifestation of the "pure activity of spirit." Without this notion, he feared that the ideal of objectivity in both scientific knowledge and ethics would collapse. Unlike Heidegger, he emphasized mental spontaneity, the mind's uninhibited freedom in the constitution of its world. Cassirer accused Heidegger of turning his back on objectivity and retreating into a kind of pragmatic relativism where space and time were reduced to merely "existential" categories without objective form.

History has not been kind to Cassirer, but we should ask ourselves if his criticism was so wide of the mark. It was Cassirer, after all, who grasped the philosophical implications of the natural sciences and especially modern mathematics and physics, whereas Heidegger betrayed the superficiality of his thinking on all such matters when he declared that "science does not think." Today when so many of our contemporary problems confront us with the need to move beyond the unfortunate divide between the natural sciences and the humanities, Cassirer's philosophy may offer greater promise. All the same, Heidegger may have been right to suggest that the old dogma of transcendental humanism could not be sustained without a covert appeal to metaphysics. Cassirer occasionally reads as if he meant to give up on metaphysics to develop a kind of phenomenology without foundationalism. But most of these gestures are only half-convincing. The urgent point of dispute at Davos remained unsolved: can there be objectivity without metaphysics?

One solution was developed by philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas, who delivered a lecture in Hamburg in 1995 on the dual occasion of the rededication of the Warburg Library and the fiftieth anniversary of Cassirer's death. Habermas expressed in his lecture great admiration for Cassirer and extoled him as a champion of democracy and Enlightenment at a moment in German history when such champions were all too few. But he also suggested that *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* did not succeed in liberating itself from the conventional paradigm of a "philosophy of consciousness." For Habermas, the philosophy of consciousness is the name for any philosophical doctrine that describes meaning from the isolated perspective of a transcendental subject who

comes to know the world primarily through representations. Over the course of the twentieth century, many philosophers have come to see this paradigm as antiquated and indefensible, chiefly because it relies on a crypto-metaphysical conception of a transcendental subject who stands beyond its own field of operation. It serves as the grounds of meaning but can give no account of its own genesis. Habermas tries to resolve this dilemma without following the path of metaphysical skeptics such as Heidegger and Foucault. Instead, he understands objective meaning as the shared creation of an irreducible plurality of subjects who build up the world through intersubjective communication and praxis. This solution helps to secure the objectivity of our language and our moral-political commitments even though it is an objectivity that has dispensed with the need for metaphysical grounds. This ideal of an intersubjectively validated objectivity derives originally from the German idealists, but one can glimpse in Cassirer's thinking a certain anticipation of Habermas' solution.

The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms is an ambivalent work that sits at the boundary between two epochs in the history of philosophy. It points in the direction of a post-metaphysical theory of the symbolic without wholly liberating itself from the older paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness. We can occasionally glimpse its author as he struggles to overcome his own philosophical inheritance, even if its authority remains too strong. This may help to explain the strange feeling of untimeliness that seems to emanate from the pages of this unusual work. Cassirer himself was a man between epochs, a contemporary of Einstein who could effortlessly call to mind lines of poetry from Schiller and Goethe. Though unashamed of his origins, he was indifferent to the claims of nation and tribe; he saw in Judaism only one source for the rational universalism that was the common inheritance of all cultures. A humanist philosopher in an age of extremes, he was in many ways the supreme representative of a world in eclipse. Although he was fortunate enough to escape the European catastrophe, he did not live long enough to see the new world that would emerge from the ruins. Whether he could have felt at home in this new age of specialization is doubtful. Erudition today is a rare commodity, and it has become just one commodity among others. For good or for ill, philosophers these days no longer have the habit of quoting Goethe. But if we look past

these marks of old-world erudition, we may yet find that *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* can come alive with new insights that even its author may never have anticipated. No genuine work of philosophy belongs only to the past.

ENDNOTES

1 Cf. Cassirer, "The Concept of Symbolic Form in the Construction of the Human Sciences," in *The Warburg Years (1919–1933). Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, trans. Steve Lofts with Antonio Calcagno, 76.
2 Ibid., 76.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Samantha Matherne (Philosophy, Harvard University) for her comments and insights on this Foreword.

Translator's Preface

Steve G. Lofts

The following translation has been made from both the original Bruno Cassirer editions and volumes 11, 12, and 13 of the *Gesammelte Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe*, edited by Birgit Recki and with text and notes prepared by Claus Rosenkranz and Julia Clemens. The translation of "'Geist' und 'Leben' in der Philosophie der Gegenwart" ("'Spirit' and 'Life' in Contemporary Philosophy") that appears in the Appendix to Volume 3 of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has been made from volume 17 of the *Gesammelte Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe*. This paper is mentioned by Cassirer in the Preface to Volume 3 and has been included to provide the reader new to Cassirer with an idea of the problematic that would come to preoccupy him.

The original pagination of the Hamburg edition is found in the margins of the translation. All the footnotes that appear within brackets are translator's notes. As the Hamburg edition is a critical edition, its editorial apparatus is extensive and as such contains a great deal of detailed information. Only the footnotes that seem most appropriate for this translation have been included. Unless a reference to an official English translation appears, all translations of the material quoted in German or French by Cassirer are my own. Official translations have often been amended so that the language of technical terms is consistent. Substantial changes to the translation have been noted. English translations for the Greek and Latin are included in parentheses where the translation was not given by Cassirer.

An attempt has been made to produce a translation that is close and faithful to the original German and to preserve the original feel of Cassirer's voice and style while providing a readable text in contemporary English. Cassirer writes in a clear, elegant, and poetic German. As with any translation, decisions have been made as to when it was more important to remain faithful to the letter of the text and when it was necessary to side with the spirit of the text. Beyond the typical challenges encountered in any translation, the translator of Cassirer is confronted with a particular problem. Other than "symbolic form" and "symbolic pregnance," Cassirer does not coin a new technical language; rather, he employs the language of German Idealism as well as the technical language of scientific research, bringing a number of thinkers and scientific disciplines into dialogue. He often, however, provides these terms with a new sense. Where possible, the standard translations of these technical terms have been adopted. In some cases, however, there are differences in translation traditions. For example, *Erkenntnisse* is rendered as "knowledge" or "cognition" by different translators. It has, therefore, often been necessary to choose, among the alternative, standard translations on the basis of what was the best overall fit in the context of Cassirer's thought.

At times it has been necessary to deviate from standard translations of certain German terms to capture subtle distinctions that would appear to be synonyms and thus would normally be translated by the same English term. As it is not always possible to translate a German term by using only one English term, in some cases more than one translation has been adopted. Like most philosophers, Cassirer has a tendency to select terms that allow him to make allusions or connect terms through the structure or morphology of the word, such as *Gestalt* (gestalt, figure or shape), *gestalten* (to configure), and *Gestaltung* (configuration); *Bild* (image), *bilden* (forming), *Bildung* (formation), etc. Where it was thought important to the understanding or simply to the appreciation of the nuances of the text, the German has been included in parentheses.

While a translation should not attempt to remove an author's gender-based language, by the same token, it should not introduce gender-based language where it does not exist. There are three genders in German: the masculine, the feminine, and the neuter. The problem occurs when we translate terms like *der Mensch* (the human or the human being) or *das Einzelne* (the individual). If we employ the pronoun "he" in these cases, we

are in fact introducing gender-based language that does not exist in Cassirer's text. The concern here is not one of political but of philosophical correctness. When we speak of "the human," we are speaking not of individual human beings but of what it means to be human *qua* human. When speaking of the "individual," the problem is compounded by the fact that Cassirer is at times speaking of *the* individual *qua* individual and at times he is speaking of *an* individual as a unique person. Whereas *the* individual *qua* individual is neither he nor she, *an* individual as a unique person is always he or she. As a basic principle, this translation endeavors not to introduce gender-specific language where it did not already exist. A number of strategies have been employed toward this goal. "*Der Mensch*" is translated as "the human" or "the human being" – the term "man" appears only when it is in an English text quoted by Cassirer or in one of his English works. In some cases, a simple restructuring of the sentence was needed to remove the pronoun or permit a repetition of the noun "the human." Generally, "the human" and "the subject" have received the pronoun "it" and the possessive pronoun "its." In a handful of cases, where it was clear that the subject of the sentence was singular, the words "they," "their," or "themself" has been used as a singular pronoun to refer to the subject or individual of an unspecified gender. This praxis dates back to the sixteenth century and is currently widely employed in informal language usage and more and more in formal contexts. Finally, in a handful of cases where Cassirer was clearly speaking of a concrete individual, both pronouns have been employed since the assumption is that the point being made would be true for women and for men.

The goal of a translation should not be to interpret for the reader but rather to facilitate the reader in undertaking their own interpretation. This said, there is always a degree of interpretation that cannot be avoided. Here is not the place to go through all of the reasons for translating a term one way as opposed to another. Other translations are possible, and some choices cannot be made except on the bases of an interpretation of Cassirer's philosophy as a whole, and in some instances, the German has been included in parentheses so that the reader is free to interpret the text differently.

Translator's Introduction

The Question Concerning the Human – Life, Form, and Freedom: *On the Way to an Open Cosmopolitanism*

Steve G. Lofts

1. THE PROJECTS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF SYMBOLIC FORMS

The philosophy of symbolic forms refers not only to the three volumes that bear its name published between 1923 and 1929 but also to a series of interconnected philosophical projects that unfolded over the course of Cassirer's life that worked out a new normative image of the human being. The philosophy of symbolic forms is not a finished philosophical system; rather, Cassirer considered his work only as a beginning, as a *Wegweiser* that shows the way to a philosophical and interdisciplinary field of inquiry into the dynamic creative energy of life, form, and the human spirit.

As a "critique of culture," the philosophy of symbolic forms extends the neo-Kantian transcendental project to an epistemo-critical analysis of the *a priori* source, nature, and limits of the different cultural sense-bestowing horizons in and through which the I and the world are separated and through which a common understanding of an intelligible reality is constructed and reconstructed. It establishes the role and function of language, art, myth, religion, and science within the *a priori* systematic unity of

culture. As a "phenomenology of cognition," the philosophy of symbolic forms establishes the dynamic process of the life of the cultural forms in and through which thinking as a life-form emerges and frees itself from its embodiment in the lived body and in concrete praxis, progressing toward the expression of its significance in art, religion, the theoretical sciences, mathematics, and philosophy. As a "systematic philosophy," it establishes the foundations for the natural, human, and cultural sciences. As a "historical project," it establishes a new understanding of the creative energies of the past in the light of contemporary theoretical, moral, and social concerns that serves as an impulse to intellectual and social life. As a "metaphysics of the symbolic," the philosophy of symbolic forms moves beyond the antinomies of classical metaphysics, situating the human in the dynamic process of the self-forming coming-into-being of life as the life of form. As a "philosophical anthropology," the philosophy of symbolic forms articulates a normative image of the human being as a symbolic animal that does not level down the human into a homogenous mode of being. This conception of the symbolic animal serves as the basis for a symbolic humanism that is not based on liberal subjectivity. To this end, the philosophy of symbolic forms provides an intersubjective ethical project that points the way to an open cosmopolitanism that is not based on a Eurocentric conception of either the human being or culture.

2. THE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF CASSIRER'S WORK

Ernst Cassirer was without doubt among the most important thinkers of the early twentieth century. However, against the background of the intellectual context of the late twentieth century, dominated, on the one hand, in the continental tradition, by phenomenology, Heideggerian philosophy, existentialism, deconstruction, anti-humanistic and post-humanistic modes of thinking and, on the other hand, in the analytical tradition, by a certain mode of logical positivism, it is not surprising that Cassirer's work would appear to many readers today to be little more than the vestige of an outmoded and bygone mode of thought that has been surpassed and has little to contribute to our contemporary intellectual and socio-political preoccupations. Although Cassirer's work has been eclipsed and marginalized by philosophical trends in the later part of the

century, one finds references and traces of influence in a number of seminal thinkers of the twentieth century both in and outside of philosophy: Hannah Arendt, Georges Bataille, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Nelson Goodman, Jürgen Habermas, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Lacan, Susanne Langer, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Emmanuel Levinas, Thomas Kuhn, Erwin Panofsky, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Leo Strauss, and Wilbur Urban, to mention but a few.

The historical importance and possible influence of Cassirer's work aside, the contemporary reader will find that his work has a great deal to say to us today. As fruitful as many of the current movements in philosophy have been, there is a growing sense that a new direction is needed today. A number of readers see in Cassirer a thinker situated between the seemingly irreconcilable projects of analytic and continental philosophy. Michael Friedman, for example, closes his study, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger*, by way of the suggestion that "those interested in finally beginning a reconciliation of the analytic and continental traditions . . . can find no better starting point than the rich treasure of ideas, ambitions, and analyses stored in [Cassirer's] astonishingly comprehensive body of philosophical work."[1]

While there are merits to the post-modern critique of subjectivity and the decentering of the human that has taken place in the twentieth century, these projects are not without their limitations or difficulties. Some readers of Foucault, for example, see in the later Foucault a turning back to some sort of humanism in positing a prediscursive or nonarchaic "subject" that escapes the subjugating discourses that construct a "subject." Whether this is so or not is a question for Foucault scholarship. There is, however, at least some prima facie support for this view, and more importantly, it points to a more general issue with the project of post-humanism itself. A certain construction of "the human" as a liberal "subject" may be effaced and disappear like a face in the sand, as Foucault says, but does not a new conception of "the human" have to replace it? A renaissance of Cassirer's work is timely in this context.[2]

In 1929 Cassirer met with Heidegger in Davos, Switzerland. The Davos encounter was much more than an ivory tower debate about the proper interpretation of Kant and more than a confrontation between Germany's two most important thinkers: it was a clash between two antithetical conceptions of philosophy and the human. The central question of the

debate was *what is the human being?* Cassirer was seen as defending the classical humanistic tradition, whereas Heidegger was seen as pointing the way forward to the new anti-humanistic tradition to come. At the time, most, including Levinas, saw Heidegger as the victor. For Levinas, it was like "participating in the creation and the end of the world" that marked the "end of a *certain* humanism."[3] The Davos debate has become emblematic of the end of modern humanism and the beginning of post-modern anti-humanism. Since Cassirer was Jewish and Heidegger would join the National Socialist Party, the debate has also become a polemical foil against the post-modern anti-humanist project.

Peter E. Gordon offers in his book *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* a detailed philosophical reconstruction of the seminal debate between Cassirer and Heidegger, its origins, and its aftermath that disentangles the substantive philosophical issues from an allegorical interpretation that understands these issues as a manifestation of political perspectives, as a debate between Cassirer's Weimar liberalism and Heidegger's Nazism. The real philosophical issue between them was a choice between two fundamentally different "normative images of humanity": between thrownness and spontaneity. In the end, however, Gordon reminds us "that neither Cassirer nor Heidegger can be rightly understood as an unremitting advocate for only one of these two principles."[4] For while it is true that Cassirer was an advocate of classical humanist values reaching back through Humboldt, Kant, and Vico to Pico della Mirandola's 1486 manifesto on humanism, *De hominis dignitate* (*On the Dignity of the Human*), he was by no means unaware of the limitations and problems with modern Enlightenment humanism or with the liberal subject that emerged from it. Cassirer's entire philosophical project must be understood as a critical rethinking of classical humanism and the nature of enlightenment. This, however, did not lead Cassirer, as it did many of his contemporaries, toward a form of anti-humanism or post-humanism; rather, it brought him to the construction of what we might call an open non-subject-centered symbolic humanism.

As we shall see, while Cassirer provides a reconstruction of Renaissance and Enlightenment humanism, he does not situate himself fully in that tradition. Rather, his reconstruction is also a transformation of the humanist tradition that undertakes the construction of a non-subject-centered symbolic humanism. Cassirer, too, acknowledges a historical

thrownness and subjugation of the individual by cultural discourses that construct a certain identity of the self while establishing the conditions of the possibility of a critical attitude that questions this subjectivity and thus is able to resist and reconstruct these cultural discourses. The reader interested in critical theory will find in Cassirer's work a method of analyzing the deep intellectual ideas and socio-political-economic mechanisms that subjugate individual freedom through the construction of a framework of understanding that configures the emotional internal life of the individual as well as the tools and the ethical principles for a socio-political project of self-liberation. We are for Cassirer, to speak with Foucault, subjugated to and by culture and yet the subjects of culture, able to construct and reconstruct the culture that determines the historical situatedness into which we are thrown.

The very project of determining the nature of *the* human in the singular does not always sit well with readers sensitive to the dangers of cultural hegemony in all its forms. While we must always be cognizant of the danger of cultural hegemony, the very concept assumes a plurality of cultures and modes of being human and thus assumes something like "the" human as a cultural being. What it maintains is simply that one historical culture cannot function as the paradigm for culture as such, that one historical mode of being human cannot be the model for all modes of being human. To recognize the other in their difference, however, we must also be able to recognize the humanity we share with them. Readers interested in comparative and intercultural studies will find that Cassirer's theory of culture provides a robust and dynamic conception of culture that avoids the dangers of cultural and intellectual hegemony: in illustrating his points, Cassirer moves quickly from one culture to another, from one historical period to another. Cassirer's philosophy points the way to an open cosmopolitanism as a regulatory ideal that expresses itself in the idea that we are "all" human and thus are all members of humanity.

3. THE ODYSSEY OF CASSIRER'S LIFE AND THOUGHT

3.1 – Marburg and the Cosmopolitan Culture of Berlin

Ernst Cassirer was born July 28, 1874, in Breslau (today Wroclaw). Cassirer began his university studies in law at the University of Berlin in 1892. Cassirer's interests, however, quickly led him to the study of

German literature (especially Goethe), history, and in particular art history, before finally bringing him to philosophy. In his lectures on Kant, Georg Simmel cited the works of Herman Cohen, the founder of the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism, as being without doubt the best works on Kant but also the most difficult. Two years later, Cassirer moved to Marburg, where he studied with Cohen and Paul Natorp. Under the direction of Natorp, who supervised his doctoral thesis, titled "Descartes' Kritik der mathematischen und naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis" (1899), Cassirer received his doctorate with the rare grade of *summa cum laude*. In 1902, his work on Descartes was published as the introduction to his *Leibniz' System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen*, which won second place in the prestigious competition of the Berlin Academy: no first prize was awarded. Along with Kant, Hegel, and Goethe, Leibniz provides one of the main intellectual sources of Cassirer's thought. In 1903, Cassirer returned to Berlin and began work on the first two volumes of his *Das Erkenntnisproblem* (1906 and 1907), which treated the period from Nicholas of Cusa to Kant. These works rapidly became, and have remained, standard references in the history of epistemology and the problem of knowledge, and we can already recognize in them the systematic problem of a critical phenomenology of cognition that will be undertaken in the philosophy of symbolic forms.

In 1906 Cassirer presented his candidacy for *Privatdozentur* at the University of Berlin. The first volume of his *Das Erkenntnisproblem* was presented as his Habilitation. Following its acceptance, Cassirer gave a public lecture titled "Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff." Four years later, Cassirer would publish *Substance and Function* (1910), which forms the foundations for his critique of culture.

According to Dimitry Gawronsky (a close friend of the Cassirer family), Cassirer once told him that

> in 1917, just as he entered a street car to ride home, the conception of the symbolic forms flashed upon him. . . . Suddenly the one-sidedness of the Kant-Cohen theory of knowledge became quite clear. . . . It is not true that only human reason opens the door which leads to the understanding of reality, it is rather the whole of the human mind, with all its functions and impulses, all its potencies of imagination, emotion, volition, and logical thinking . . . which determines and molds our conception of reality.[5]

It is not difficult to appreciate how the cosmopolitan culture of Berlin shortly after the turn of the century would have been the ideal environment for the inception of the project of a "critique of culture" – for at the fin-de-siècle, Berlin, along with Vienna, formed one of the main cultural hubs of Europe. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Berlin was the site of a relentlessly self-renewing modernity; it was, as the art historian Karl Scheffler puts it in almost Cassirerian terms, "always to be in the process of becoming and never to be."[6] Through his family, Cassirer would have had a unique insight into the rich cultural life of Berlin: the worlds of art, music, film, cabaret, and literature as well as the worlds of science, economics, and politics. The Cassirer family were affluent assimilated Jews and held a prominent position in Berlin society: Max Cassirer and Cassirer's father were influential businessmen; his cousins, Richard Cassirer and Kurt Goldstein, were famous neurologists; Fritz Cassirer was a composer and conductor at the *Berliner Komische Oper*; Bruno Cassirer ran a publishing house for art and literature and published Cassirer's ten-volume edition of Kant; and Paul and Bruno Cassirer, together with the painter Max Liebermann, were the founders of the Berliner Secession. Through the Berliner Secession and the Cassirer Gallery, Paul Cassirer brought the works of Cézanne, Manet, Monet, Munch, and Van Gogh to Berlin and so introduced impressionism, post-impressionism, and expressionism to Germany. In this context, immersed in all the different forms of culture, Cassirer developed the project of a critique of culture.

During the First World War, Cassirer worked in the War Press office in Berlin, where he was able to follow the development of the war from various non-German perspectives in the different foreign newspapers. Cassirer wrote a short work titled *Freiheit und Form* (*Freedom and Form*) (1916), a wonderful study that establishes the historical, and even dialectical, course of the concepts of freedom and form from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, as quintessential to German thought and, therefore, to German culture: the work presents Kant and Goethe (and by extension German culture) as part of a larger European intellectual tradition and culture. In the lived context of World War I, the political importance of Cassirer's book would not have been lost on its readers, and in the juxtaposition of Kant and Goethe, of freedom and form, we find the theoretical seeds of the philosophy of symbolic forms as a "critique of culture" and a "morphology of spirit." We also

see here a classic example of the fusion between systematic, historical, and socio-political questions that is characteristic of Cassirer's philosophical method and outlook.

3.2 – The University of Hamburg and the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg*

After the war, Cassirer secured a position at the University of Hamburg and so left his beloved Berlin. The choice was a fortunate one: for just as Berlin, with all its diverse cultural forces and its relentlessly self-renewing becoming, had been the ideal cultural environment for the inception of the critique of culture, Hamburg, and in particular the Warburg Library for the Cultural Sciences (*Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg*), would prove to be the ideal environment to realize this project.

Although Cassirer's work was already conceptually well advanced by the time he arrived in Hamburg, there was still a considerable amount of concrete research to be done. As destiny would have it, the Warburg Library contained all the concrete material on art, myth, religion, and language that would be indispensable to this research. Cassirer immediately recognized in the structure of the library itself the reflection of his own philosophical perspective. All of the concrete-historical work of spirit was there, ordered and classified systematically according to the same internal logic of cultural forms that he was developing. Cassirer quickly became close friends with the library's director, the art historian Fritz Saxl, as well as Aby Warburg himself, and was soon one of the institute's most important contributors.

Perhaps more important than the concrete-material resources of the library, however, was the intellectual community of scholars that worked at the Warburg Library and the collaborative, interdisciplinary ethos that it fostered. Not only did Cassirer meet a number of new and important colleagues in Hamburg, but he also closely collaborated with them. Among them there was the art historian Erwin Panofsky, whose lectures Cassirer attended and whose work has clearly been influenced by Cassirer.[7] Cassirer would also meet the psychologists William Stern and Heinz Werner, whose work on the psychology of language figures prominently in Cassirer's own writings of this period. Stern and Cassirer organized together the twelfth congress of the German Society of Psychology, which took place in Hamburg in 1931. Cassirer also attended

the lectures of the biologist Jacob Uexküll during this period. In his later work, Cassirer draws a clear parallel between his own theory of symbolic forms and Uexküll's theory of organic forms.

The Warburg years were the most productive years of Cassirer's life.[8] In the first two years, he published his *Einstein's Theory of Relativity* (1921) and the third volume of *Das Erkenntnisproblem* that focused on the systems of philosophy after Kant up to and including Hegel. The first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* on language was published in 1923, and the second volume on myth was published two years later, in 1925. Although the manuscript for the third volume had already been completed by 1927, it was not published until 1929. During this time, Cassirer continued to struggle with the conclusion that was to bring his philosophy into dialogue with the contemporary philosophical movement of Lebensphilosophie; however, he finally decided to postpone this critical part so as to not make the volume longer than it already was with issues that went beyond the primary focus of the volume. Cassirer, nevertheless, promised to publish it under the title "'Life' and 'Spirit' – Toward a Critique of Contemporary Philosophy." In 1929, Cassirer gave a lecture on spirit and life in Max Scheler's philosophy at Davos. A version of this paper appeared in 1930 in *Die neue Rundschau* and was originally translated into English in place of "The Philosopher's Reply" in the Library of Living Philosophers volume on Cassirer.[9] In the end, this final chapter had become a work unto itself and drew Cassirer to consider the metaphysics of the symbolic in what was to be a fourth volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. The chapters and notes for this volume have been published as the first volume of his *Nachlass* and translated into English by John M. Krois as *The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms*. Finally, Cassirer wrote four seminal studies on the Renaissance and the Enlightenment during this period: *Individual and Cosmos in the Renaissance* (1927), *The Case of Jacques Rousseau* (1932), *Platonic Renaissance in England* (1932), and *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932).

3.3 – Life in Exile

From 1929 to 1930, Cassirer served as Rector of Hamburg University, and while he was not the first Jew to hold this position, given the sociopolitical context of the times, this fact speaks to the great esteem in which

Cassirer was held. Only three years later, however, on January 30, 1933, Hitler became chancellor of Germany. In the first weeks of the Third Reich, it was announced in the newspapers that "The law is what serves the Führer"; by March of the same year, the first concentration camp at Dachau had been opened; in April, the Laws for the Reestablishment of the Civil Service were established, which barred all Jews from holding civil service, university, and state positions; on April 27, Cassirer wrote the university informing them that he was taking a leave of absence, and with this, the Cassirers, like many other German intellectuals of Jewish descent, left Germany to take up a life in exile; by July, the University of Hamburg, the same university that had only a few years before made him rector, officially informed Cassirer that he had been retired from his post. The University of Upsala in Sweden, Oxford in England, and the New School of Social Research in New York all offered Cassirer safe haven. After some reflection, Cassirer accepted the invitation from All Souls College at Oxford and left for England. After two years at Oxford, Cassirer accepted a post at the University of Göteborg in Sweden.

Of the massive body of work that was produced during this period, only five monographs were published during Cassirer's lifetime. *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics*, which continues the project of grounding the mathematical natural sciences, was published in 1936. An introduction to the Swedish philosopher Alex Hägerström (*Alex Hägerström*) and an essay on Descartes' influence on the seventeenth century and in particular on the Swedish queen Christine (*Descartes. Lehre – Persönlichkeit – Wirkung*) were both published in 1939. Cassirer was clearly rethinking his entire philosophical project during this period. In the summer of 1940, however, destiny forced his hand: the time for reflection had come to an end, and in this "dreadful moment in world history," as Toni Cassirer calls it in her biography of her life with Cassirer, Cassirer wrote in the space of four months *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences* (1942) and the fourth volume of *The Problem of Knowledge* (1942).[10] Each in their own way addresses the "failure of philosophy" since the "death of Hegel" to establish the "unity of science" and to address the facticity of reality and thus establish the firm foundations of rationality.

On May 20, 1941, the Cassirers left Sweden on the steamer *Remarren* destined for New York. Yale University had invited Cassirer to come as a visiting professor. The new world was full of old friends also living

in exile: Panofsky, Einstein, Wind, his student Solmitz, and the gestalt psychologist Wertheimer, to mention but a few. But true to his nature, Cassirer quickly made new friends and learned about new perspectives. Already on the dangerous voyage (the *Remarren* was the last passenger liner to make the crossing until after the war), he had met and passed the time with the structural linguist Roman Jacobson. It is not without some importance that positive references to linguistic structuralism immediately began to appear in Cassirer's work.[11]

Cassirer remained active and productive. Teaching and participating in seminars, he still found time to publish numerous articles and write two books. *An Essay on Man* is more than a simple résumé of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. It is the product of a profound rethinking and reframing of the project in the light of new knowledge and the realization, as Cassirer expresses it at the end of *The Myth of the State*, that "human culture is by no means the firmly established thing that we once supposed it to be."[12] Cassirer's philosophy has clearly become a philosophical transcendental anthropology, and the "critique of culture" has become a critique of the *animal symbolicum*. In *The Myth of the State*, Cassirer furthers his analysis of the reasons for this failure through his study of the modern "technique of myth" employed by the architects of National Socialism.

Cassirer found himself marooned in the new world. Although Yale University was able to extend its invitation for another year, it was unable to do so for a third. Cassirer was therefore invited to Columbia University for one year. The following year, he was to continue west, to the University of California. However, on April 13, 1945, Cassirer died of a heart attack on his way to the Columbia University Faculty Chess Club.

4. THE HISTORICAL AND SYSTEMATIC UNFOLDING OF THE PROJECTS OF *THE PHILOSOPHY OF SYMBOLIC FORMS* AS A RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

4.1 – The Historical Context of the Crisis at the Fin-de-Siècle

The nineteenth century experienced a radical restructuring and reorientation of socio-economic-political life; it also witnessed a rapid and profound progress and transformation in the positivist sciences. A new debate on the form and direction that our socio-political life should take

began: if modernity was to bring about self-autonomy, it remained to determine the shape that this self-governance would take. Within a few years of each other, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill had established the discourses of the left and the right that would form the basic framework of socio-political thinking for the next century. The relentlessly self-renewing progress of modernity, however, increasingly challenged and eventually undercut the fundamental principles of the substantialist ontology on which it had been grounded. A crisis in the foundations of mathematics broke out when it became apparent that mathematics was unable to account for its most basic principles. Given that the sciences had been modeled on mathematics since Descartes, this crisis quickly escalated into a crisis in the foundations of science. Since European culture had been founded on the concept of rationality, the crisis in the foundations of both the natural and human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*] undermined the principles of rationality that had grounded Western civilization since the Greeks. And since modernity was based in large part on the modern philosophy of the subject, which had been built on the principles of ancient ontology, the collapse of a substantialist reading of these ontological principles threw into doubt the whole philosophical, and with it socio-political, project of modernity.

The crisis was anything but a merely ivory tower affair: such popular works like Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912) and Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918) attested to the growing sense of malaise as the ontological ground gave way, ushering in the end of a world. This crisis would form the intellectual and socio-political context of a whole generation of artists, theologians, mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers. The debate among Dedekind, Frege, Russell, Poincaré, Hilbert, and Cassirer must be understood against the background of the crisis in the foundations of mathematics. Heidegger undertook the project of fundamental ontology in *Being and Time* in response to the crisis in Western ontology, and Husserl developed transcendental phenomenology in response to a crisis in the European sciences. And like Husserl, Cassirer came to see the crisis not merely as "a grave theoretical problem" but as "an imminent threat to the whole extent of our ethical and cultural life."[13] For Cassirer, the crisis was above all a crisis in human self-understanding, a crisis in ethical freedom. It is as a response to this crisis that Cassirer's work must be read.

4.2 – Substance-Concepts and Function-Concepts: A Response to the Crisis in the Foundations of Mathematics and the Relationalist Framework of Cassirer's Philosophy

The central aim of *Substance and Function* is to establish the foundations of mathematics and the mathematical natural sciences. The source and the nature of the crisis in the foundations of mathematics and the mathematical natural sciences, as well as Cassirer's response, are clearly stated in the title of his 1910 work. A more precise translation of *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* would have been *Substance-Concept and Function-Concept*, as Cassirer demonstrates and argues in this work for the primacy of function-concepts over substance-concepts. In terms of the grounding of mathematics, the central issue concerns the relationship between mathematics and pure logic. In keeping with the main tenets of the Marburg School, Cassirer sees mathematics as grounded on pure formal logic. This formal logic is, however, understood by Cassirer in terms of a theory of relations and an idea of a functional unity. Concept formation is rooted in ontology, and the shift from substance-concepts to function-concepts marks a transition from an ontology of substance to an ontology of relation. Cassirer is effectively inverting the relationship between relation and being as it has been understood in the Western tradition.

The source of the crisis is traced back to the tradition's reliance on substance-concepts that are rooted in an ontology that takes substance as the ground of being. As such, concept formation is seen as a process of abstraction of the common characteristics inherent in the pre-conceptual and even pre-cognitive existence of a self-identical substantial being, and truth is a correspondence between the judgment and the reality that exists independently of the concept that copies it. A logic grounded on substance can only be a logic of concepts and abstractions.[14] The problem with this traditional logic of abstraction and the correspondence theory of truth is that it leads to an empty formalism, whereby the conceptual and logical are separated from the real by a gulf that can never be bridged.

The pure mathematical manifestation of this function relation takes the form of $\varphi(x)$. The φ of the propositional function represents the structural law of the ensemble of a pure differentiated relational structure. Let us consider a simple example of the whole-number series 1, 2, 3, ... In terms of a function relation, we can write this as $(x+1)(0, 1,$

2, 3, . . .). The sense (*Sinn*) of the numbers 1, 2, 3. . . is nothing other than the open-ended series of positions in which each stands in the differentiated relational structure (x+1) that *produces* them. The significance (*Bedeutung*) of 2 is therefore that it comes after 1 and before 3. The number 2 has neither an intrinsic value nor an extrinsic value, and neither does it exist immanently in itself nor is it grounded in some higher existence that transcends it; rather, its value is determined by the relational *position* that it occupies as a member of the differentiated unitary whole as an ensemble of all the elements of the series. The law (x+1) constitutes the sense (*Sinn*) of the whole-number series in its unitary whole, in which the number 2 is understood as the thing that it is, the number two. If (x+1) constitutes the universal and 2 the particular, then there is no dualism that separates them as in classical metaphysics. Cassirer characterizes this relationship in his 1913 article "Erkenntnistheorie nebst de Grenzfragen der Logik." The paragraph is remarkable in its anticipation of the concept of "symbolic pregnance," which stands, as we shall see, at the heart of Cassirer's critique of culture:

> If one follows this view further through, it would seem that the sense [*Sinn*] of all objective judgments reduces to an ultimate *originary-relationship* [*Urverhältnis*], which can be expressed in different formulations as the relationship [*Verhältnis*] of "form" to "content," as the relationship of "universal" to "individual," as the relationship of "validity" to "being." Whatever designation one may ultimately choose here, what is truly decisive is that the basic relation itself is to be retained as a *strictly unitary* relation, that can only be designated through the two opposing elements [*gegensätzlichen Momente*] that enter into it, but can never be constructed out of them, as if they were in themselves presently available pieces of a consistent existence [*Bestand*]. The originary-relationship is not to be defined in such a way that the "universal" somehow "exists" next to or above the "individual," as if the form were somehow separated from the content, as if the two were then melded with one another by means of some or another fundamental synthesis of knowledge [*Wissen*]. Rather, the unity of mutual determination forms the absolutely first datum, *behind which one can go back no further*, and which can only be dissected [*zerlegen*] into the duality of two "view-points" [*Gesichtspunkte*] in an artificially isolating process

> of abstraction. It is the basic error of all metaphysical epistemologies that they repeatedly attempt to reinterpret this duality of "elements" [*Momente*] as a duality of "elements" [*Elemente*].[15]

Central to Cassirer's entire philosophical outlook, and this is in keeping with the Marburg school that rejected Kant's two-stem doctrine, is that differences in validity or sense cannot be understood by tracing them back to ontically real differences.

> Whoever . . . converts the Kantian "dualism" of form and matter, which is a difference of significance and transcendental "validity," into a divergence and juxtaposition of things in real existence, has thereby already missed the decisive point of view needed for the profound understanding of this difference. For us, in any case, it is certain that pure phenomenological "sensation" and "sense-bearing" are only given as an indivisible unity. We can never completely separate the sensory as such, as some naked "raw material" of sensation, from the whole complex of sense (*Sinnverbände*).[16]

Rather than recognizing the apparent dualism as the result of a necessary duality of sight (*Sicht*), the metaphysical tradition continually tears this unitary interconnection asunder and treats each of the two "elements" (*Momente*) of this "originary-relationship" as if they existed in themselves, independently of each other and of the relational structure that determines them in their being (*Wesen*). Metaphysical systems differ, for Cassirer, only in terms of which of the two elements they privilege: which they see as the ground of the other. Metaphysical thought, however, always ends in unresolvable antinomies that can be overcome only through a quasi-mystical transcendence and fusion of the two elements or by the negation or sublation of one of the elements by the other. However, both strategies end, for Cassirer, in the destruction of their own position. Throughout Cassirer's work, we see the same strategy of reading that follows the historical process by which the metaphysical isolating and privileging of one of the elements of this "originary-relationship" is forced by the internal logic of its own position to acknowledge the marginalized element and even transition into it. We see this concretely in the way that Cassirer presents the history of philosophy as the history of a struggle between

polar dichotomies: between rationalism and empiricism, between idealism and materialism, between philosophy and myth; between form and matter, being and nothing, thought and reality, life and spirit, freedom and form. Cassirer is clear that each position is equally one-sided and exists as a position only in its opposition to the other position. In reading Cassirer, it is necessary to be aware of this dialectical and dialogical movement between diametrically polar positions. Finally, this "originary-relationship" will become the central concept of Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms – namely, "symbolic pregnance" (discussed later) – and prefigures one of the essential elements in his metaphysics of the symbolic form – namely, the *Urphänomena* "behind which one can go back no further."

Substance and Function thus addresses the crisis in the foundations of mathematics and the mathematical natural sciences by grounding mathematics in pure formal logic and by understanding pure formal logic in terms of a theory of relations as a complex functional unitary ensemble of differentiated relational positions that can be expressed by the mathematical expression $\varphi(x)$. The transition from substance-concepts to function-concepts that takes place in modern mathematics marks a transition in ontology; the object (x) is no longer a substantial being to be copied but a relational being whose sense is the logic that governs the whole in which it is located. In *Einstein's Theory of Relativity* (1921) and *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics* (1936), Cassirer extends his functional analysis to the general theory of relativity and to quantum mechanics, respectively.

4.3 – The Critique of Culture: A Response to the Crisis in the Foundations of the Human Sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*]

(i) From the Mathematical Function to the Symbolic Function: From a Critique of Reason to a Critique of Culture

Having established the foundations for mathematical and natural-scientific thinking, Cassirer turned his attention to the structure and foundations of the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). There is no ideal translation for *Geisteswissenschaften*, and while "the human sciences" has been adopted, it is not without problems. Another possible translation in the context of Cassirer's work might have been "the cultural sciences." However, it is necessary to keep clear the difference between the transcendental

philosophical project of the "critique of culture" (*Kritik der Kultur*) that is to provide the foundation for the "*Geisteswissenschaften*." Cassirer also employs, as we shall see, the term "*Kulturwissenschaften*" (the cultural sciences) in other later works, and the focus and scope of the *Kulturwissenschaften* differs from that of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. It is also important to distinguish the *Geisteswissenschaften* (in the plural) from the *Geisteswissenschaft* (in the singular). In the singular, the *Geisteswissenschaft* suggests Hegel's project of "the science of spirit"; in the plural, the *Geisteswissenschaften* suggests Dilthey's project of the "human sciences." In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer distances himself from other schools of neo-Kantianism – e.g., Heinrich Rickert's theory of the *Kulturwissenschaften* – and aligns himself with Dilthey; thus, while there are differences between Cassirer and Dilthey on the methodological nature of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, the standard translation of the *Geisteswissenschaften* in Dilthey's work has been adopted. It is important not to think of the *Geisteswissenschaften* or the *Kulturwissenschaften* in terms of the contemporary conception of the "humanities." The *Geisteswissenschaften* would include such disciplines as history, economics, politics, psychology, the law, the study of religion, architecture, sociology, and social anthropology, none of which would be included in what is traditionally understood by "the humanities." Part of the problem is that "science" has come to be equated in English with "the natural sciences," and there is no current equivalent to the *Geisteswissenschaften* today. The main debate at the beginning of the twentieth century centered on the methodological foundations for the *Geisteswissenschaften* that would distinguish them from the "*Naturwissenscahften*" (the natural sciences).

The central problem for Cassirer was that the dominant methodological paradigms of the human sciences at the beginning of the twentieth century – positivism, naturalism, psychologism, and historicism – were reductionistic in their approach to the human and unable to establish the condition of the possibility of objective validity; this leads to the fragmentation of the human and to intellectual and socio-political relativism and skepticism. The crisis stems from the fact that these approaches were not grounded in a theory of the human sciences and by extension in an adequate concept of the human as such: in short, the crisis is a crisis in the self-understanding of the human. We see throughout the three volumes of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* Cassirer engaging positivism, naturalism, psychologism, and historicism.

Cassirer quickly recognized, however, the limitations of the traditional approach to the problem. To establish the foundations for the human

sciences, it would be necessary to broaden, reframe, and differentiate his philosophical response to the crisis in the mathematical natural sciences:

> Rather than investigating only the general presuppositions of the scientific cognition of the world, it was equally necessary to differentiate the different basic forms of "understanding" of the world and comprehend each one of them as sharply as possible in their distinctive tendency and spiritual form. Only when such a "morphology" [*Formenlehre*: theory of forms] of spirit had been established, at least in general outline, could we hope to ground a clearer methodological view and a more secure principle of grounding for the individual disciplines of the human sciences.[17]

The first reference to the project of the philosophy of symbolic forms is found in *Einstein's Theory of Relativity*. The passage is important to understanding the project of a critique of culture:

> It is the task of *systematic philosophy*, which *extends far beyond epistemology*, to free the worldview from this *one-sidedness*. It has to grasp the *whole system* of symbolic forms, the application of which produces for us the concept of a structured reality, and by virtue of which subject and object, I and world are *separated and opposed* to each other in determinate configurations, and it must refer *each individual in this totality to its fixed place*. If we assume this problem solved, then the rights would be assured, and the boundaries designated, of each of the particular forms of the conceptual and cognitive forms such as the general forms of the theoretical, ethical, aesthetic, and religious *understandings of the world* [*Weltverständnis*]. Each particular form would be "relativized" with regard to the others, but since this "relativization" is throughout reciprocal and since *no single form but only the systematic totality can serve as the expression of "truth" and "reality*," the limit that results appears as a thoroughly immanent limit, as one that is removed as soon as we again relate the individual to the system of the whole.[18]

A number of elements in this citation merit emphasis. The project of a "critique of culture" is a "systematic philosophy" that establishes the "whole system of symbolic forms" as a systematic unity in which each form has its own function in the dynamic, creative process of objectification.[19] As a

transcendental project, the epistemo-critical analysis begins from the basic *factum* of the different cultural manifestations and seeks to establish their *a priori* source, nature, and limits or boundaries. Each symbolic form is a unique mode of the symbolic function possessing its own logic of sense that determines its own understanding of objectivity. Each symbolic form thus performs a specific function within the unity of culture as the objective expression of the symbolic function. Together, the symbolic process undertakes the formation, configuration, and structuring of reality in and through which the I and the world are separated, opposed, and interconnectively related: as Cassirer often puts it, the great process of "the setting asunder (*Auseinandersetzung*) of the I and world" (for a discussion of *Auseinandersetzung*, cf. below). One of the main tenets of Cassirer's philosophy is that neither the world of objects nor the inner world of the subject exists prior to or independently of the symbolic. We are always already in the symbolic, and all intuition, perception, emotion, and thinking are structured and constructed by the symbolic "energies" of objective spirit. There is therefore no pre-symbolic truth that can act as the measure of absolute truth by which the truth claim of each of the different modes of understanding can be measured. What is more, no one symbolic form possesses a monopoly on the truth; only the systematic totality of the different modes of understanding can serve as the expression of "truth" and "reality." It is important to keep in mind that a transcendental critique of culture is concerned with only the conditions of the possibility of the *factum* of culture and can say nothing about the *facticity* of any specific culture. It can inquire only into the function and structure of the different cultural forms and their function in the ensemble of symbolic forms as the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of any given historically concrete culture.

In the aforementioned 1917 quotation from *Einstein's Theory of Relativity*, we should also note that Cassirer speaks, following Cohen's account of culture,[20] of "theoretical, ethical, aesthetic and religious understandings of the world," but he does not speak of language and myth. The inclusion of myth marks an important evolution in Cassirer's thinking that will distinguish his understanding of culture from that of Cohen's and Natorp's, and it is no doubt in part a result of his reading of Schelling and the influence of Aby Warburg's Nietzschean views on myth. We see as late as 1923 Cassirer reframe his project so as to widen its scope. Krois draws our attention to the fact that in 1923 Cassirer changes the title on

the proofs for volume one from *The Phenomenology of Cognition: Groundlines for a Theory of the Spiritual Forms of Expression* to *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.[21] The project of a phenomenology of cognition, which will become the title of the third volume, is now situated in a larger project and must begin from a transcendental critique of language and mythical thought.

(ii) The Symbolic Forms as the Energies of Objective Spirit and the Construction of the Organs-Sights of Reality

In 1936, Cassirer clearly states the purpose and limits of a transcendental critique of culture:

> What we are searching for are not the historical phenomena themselves. We try to analyze and to understand the fundamental *modes* of thinking, of conceiving, of representing, imagining, and picturing that are contained in language, myth, art, religion, and even in science. Instead of following up the phenomena singly and stringing them together on the thread of history, instead of considering them in their succession or in their connection of cause and effect, we inquire into the nature of the different *functions* on which the phenomena, taken as a whole, depend. We are no longer studying artworks, the products of mythical or religious thought, but the working powers, the mental (*geistig*) activities that are required in order to produce these works. If we succeed in gaining an insight into the character of these powers, if we understand them, not in their historical origin, but in their structure, if we conceive in what way they are different from each other but nevertheless cooperate with each other, we have reached a new knowledge about the character of human culture.[22]

The *factum* for Cassirer is the symbolic activity of objective spirit in all its diversity – i.e., the activity of culture which is trans-individual. For Cassirer, all "seeing" (*Sehen*) is made possible through the "sight" (*Sicht*) of spirit that functions as a hermeneutical horizon that forms a mode of understanding that posits (*setzen*), configures (*gestalten*), and thus conditions (*bedingen*) the object seen: intuited, perceived, felt, or thought. Symbolic sight thus determines the basic tendency or direction of seeing as well as the modes of givenness of the object but it also conditions the

subject who sees. The task (*Aufgabe*) of philosophy is thus to return from the "*forma formata*" (from that which has become) to the "*forma formans*" (the principle of becoming). It moves from the products or works (*Ergon*) of culture to the creative energies (*Energeia*) that construct them – for example, from the artwork to the work of art. Throughout his work, Cassirer repeatedly emphasizes that the symbolic forms do not picture (*abbilden*) an already-existing reality, be it subjective or objective, but are the original, and therefore transcendental, energies by which the I and object, the I and you, are separated, conditioned, and rendered intelligible: the symbolic forms as "form-bestowing" are "sense-bestowing" and as such bring about the "construction" (*Aufbau*) of the world of the objects as well as the world of subjects, which do not exist independently of the hermeneutical horizons that construct and condition them. Hence, we should not see the symbolic as mediating per se but rather as the "between": as the notion of mediation suggests the poles that are joined by mediation already exist before the bridge of mediation, whereas the "between" operates in the differentiation and relating of the two poles (we will return to this in a later section).

(iii) A General Semiotic Theory of the Logic of Sense and the General Problem of Signification (Bedeutung)

Cassirer, looking back at his own philosophical development, states the nature of the transition from his earlier work in establishing the foundations for mathematics to his project of a critique of culture:

> More and more we have been forced to recognize that the area of theoretical sense (*Sinn*) that we designate with the name "cognition" (*Erkenntnis*) and "truth," no matter how significant and fundamental, represent only *one* layer of sense (*Sinnschicht*). In order to understand it, in order to recognize its structure (*Struktur*), we must compare and contrast this layer with the other sense dimensions. We must, in other words, conceive the problem of cognition and the problem of truth as particular cases of the more general problem of significance [*Bedeutung*].[23]

In *Substance and Function*, mathematics is grounded in pure formal logic, which is in turn understood in terms of a theory of relation whose ideal

symbolic expression is the mathematical function relation $\varphi(x)$. Cassirer now grounds the mathematical function relation in a general theory of sense (*Sinn*) and situates it in the context of the general problem of signification (*Bedeutung*) as a distinctive mode and ideal manifestation of the symbolic function. A symbolic form as a symbolic function thus operates as an ensemble of *relations* that constitutes a *referential totality* or a coherent interconnectional context [*Zusammenhang*] that forms a hermeneutical horizon of sense in and through which a specific mode of *Weltverständnis*, an understanding that constitutes the intelligibility of a world, is determined. Each symbolic form possesses its own logic of sense, of which the logic of rational theoretical sense is but one. While the project of the critique of culture is to lay the foundations for the human sciences, it also relativizes the theoretical rational sense of the *globus intellectualis* of the neo-Kantian project and marks an important transformation in the sense of culture that operates in the project of a critique of culture.

Culture is, for Marburg neo-Kantianism, produced by rational agents and is, therefore, the objective form of reflective rationality itself. Cohen had broadened the notion of a critique of reason to include all the rational forms of culture. In Cassirer's view of culture as the ensemble of diverse modes of sense-bestowing forms, however, we find a far broader sense of culture. Culture is now understood as "a life 'in' sense (*Sinn*),"[24] and these rational forms of culture that formed the totality of reflective rational culture for Cohen are but modes of sense-bestowing among others that form the ensemble of senses that is the life of objective spirit in which the human *always already* finds itself.

Two things merit emphasis here. First, reason, as a specific mode of sense-bestowing, is now grounded in culture as a particular mode of cultural sense. Like Foucault, Cassirer focuses on the different logics according to which different sense-bestowing forms, symbolic forms or discourses, determine their own sense of objective truth and experience of reality. The rational forms of culture that are the objective forms of reasons now stand alongside other modes of objectifying and experience. If we wish to speak of the rational structure of the different cultural strata, then we must speak in the plural of rationalities. Whereas Kant speaks of understanding and experience in the singular, here we must speak of understandings and experiences. For Cohen, the products of rational culture are given as the objects of *scientific* experience and form the *factum* from which the reconstruction

of reason begins. In *An Essay on Man*, however, Cassirer reminds us that "reason is a very inadequate term with which to comprehend the forms of man's cultural life in all their richness and variety."[25] As Cassirer points out, myth is not a *factum* that neo-Kantianism could recognize, and in fact, a "critique of mythical consciousness" must

> appear not only as a precarious venture but even as a paradoxical one, considering the present state of critical and systematic philosophy. . . . Is the world of myth . . . a *factum* . . . in any way comparable to the world of theoretical cognition, the world of art, or that of ethical consciousness?[26]

Strictly speaking, myth is not "irrational" but "non-rational" – and, in fact, while Cassirer does employ the term "irrational" in the context of myth, he often puts the term in scare quotes. Myth is a mode of sense-bestowing whose validity and logic of sense are different from the logic of sense that operates in other modes of sense-bestowing. The philosophy of symbolic forms, as a phenomenology of cognition, reconstructs how the reflective rational forms of culture emerge out of and beyond other, more-concrete modes: this will involve the self-reflectivity not of reason, as in the case of Hegel, but of the self-reflectivity of culture. For the *concept* of culture that conditions a cognitive theoretical sense of the lifeworld of meaning itself can be said to be a concept of *culture* – i.e., a concept that belongs to a historical cultural world of meaning.

The second thing to be emphasized here is that this broader concept of culture does not commit Cassirer to a Foucauldian historicization of the transcendental that would result in a historical relativization of logical validity. As a transcendental account of culture, the critique of culture establishes the objective validity of the different sense-bestowing forms involved in the construction and constitution of a world of meaning. There are, however, many historical worlds, and between these historical worlds will be an incommensurability. Greeks and Greek things will belong to a Greek world and a Greek experience conditioned by an intelligibility unique to it. Culture is the referential totality of relations that constitutes the lived, historical world in which one always already finds oneself with others and with objects that, like oneself, belong to that world: culture in the widest sense means simply

the surrounding world (*Umwelt*) in which one "lives." The critique of culture is a transcendental account of the formation and configuration of the world of sense: where one finds the human, one finds a being living in a cultural world of sense. Thus, while the system of historical, significative contents that is found in each world is unique to it, the sense of the world is the same. Cassirer thus generalizes what Humboldt says about language to the whole of culture: by the same spiritual act by which the human spins culture out of itself, the human spins itself into culture – so that in the end the human communicates and lives with intuitive objects in no other manner than that shown by the medium of culture. And although historical cultures may differ in their perspectives of reality, there is a perspective that is unique to the human that distinguishes itself from the world of an animal in that the inner form of these worlds is the same. Cassirer makes this clear in speaking about language:

> For, as languages distinguish themselves from one another by way of a particular "standpoint of the view of the world," there is a view of the world of language itself, by virtue of which language stands out from the totality of the spiritual forms and in which language partly connects itself with the view of the world of scientific cognition, art, and myth, and also partly distances itself from them.[27]

During the 1920s, then, the project of a philosophy of symbolic forms was conceived of as a "critique of culture" that would provide a transcendental morphology of the different form-bestowing energies of spirit that functioned as the sense-bestowing hermeneutical horizons in which the intelligibility of a world comes to be understood as the world that it is and, by the same token, as the modes of world-making by which a world – objective as well as subjective – comes to be.

In the introduction to volume I, Cassirer explicitly situates this project in the context of the "general function of signs" and the "problem of signification":

> the sign is no mere accidental cloak of thought, but its necessary and essential organ. It serves not merely for the communication of a finished given content of thought, but is an instrument, by virtue of which

> this content itself developed and by virtue of which it initially gained its full determinacy. The act of conceptual determination of a content goes hand in hand with the act of its fixation in some characteristic sign. Thus, all truly rigorous and exact thinking is sustained by the *symbolism* and *semiotics* on which it is based.[28]

Cassirer generalizes what is said here to the whole of culture: each symbolic form as "form-bestowing" is "sense-bestowing," and this "sense-bestowing" is achieved through the function of "sign-bestowing." Sense is constituted in and through the ensemble of sensible signs as an interconnection of relations.

Cassirer employs the terms *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* as *terminus technicus* throughout his philosophy without explicitly defining them as such. Both are synonymic translations of "meaning"; however, translating them into English as meaning is not without problems. *Bedeutung* can also be used in German to designate "significance" or "signification"; there is, however, an important difference between these two terms. The term "significance" designates the meaning, relevance, or importance of something. "Signification," on the other hand, refers to that which is signified by something: meaning, import, implication. The "significance" of an emblem, word, image, or pure sign is an evaluation of the importance or meaning of these signs in a subjective context that exceeds their objective signification. The "signification" of an emblem, word, image, or pure sign is, on the other hand, what each signifies, their meaning, what is intended to be understood by the sign. The signification is thus something objective. In both cases, it would be possible to speak of the "meaning" of the emblem, word, image, or pure sign, but this would level down the difference between their signification and significance.

Frege employs *Bedeutung* for the referent of an expression and *Sinn* for the general meaning or sense. By contrast, Husserl uses the term *Bedeutung* where Frege uses *Sinn*, and Husserl uses *Gegenstand* to stand for the referent of an expression. For Husserl, then, *Sinn* designates the ideal content of an act, its noematic *Sinn*. *Sinn* is a more general concept than is *Bedeutung*. This, of course, only raises the question as to Cassirer's own use of these terms and how to render them into English. It would seem that the emblem, word, image, or pure sign each has a meaning that includes both a *Sinn* and a *Bedeutung*: in fact, what we call "meaning" in

English is a product of this interconnection. As with Husserl, though perhaps for different reasons, *Sinn* is a more general concept for Cassirer than is *Bedeutung*. *Sinn* designates the general relational context that functions as a hermeneutical horizon in which something is understood as the thing that it is. Symbolic forms are *Sinn*-bestowing and not *Bedeutung*-bestowing, and all *Bedeutung* belongs to a specific mode of symbolic formation and thus to a specific mode of *Sinn*. The "sense" of a word is more general and open to determination through interpretation than is the signification that it gains in the context of use or from a dictionary. What is more, in numerous places, Cassirer plays on the relation between *Sinn* and *Sinne*, which can be captured only if they are translated as sense and senses, respectively. Finally, it would seem that Cassirer employs the term "*Bedeutung*" at times in the sense of significance and at times in the sense of signification. At times it would appear, as in Frege, that the referent of a sign is its *Bedeutung*. All fact is a product of a theoretical act: thus, the object, as sign, is its *Bedeutung*. This is clearly the case, for example, when we speak of the pure signs of mathematics: the referent is the pure signification of the sign as it has been defined and determined by the law of its generation. What becomes clear is that each symbolic form, as sense-bestowing, is sign-bestowing and that each of the different modes of signs (emblem, word, image, or pure sign) possess a *Bedeutung* content. Only in the case of pure signs is this a pure *Bedeutung*. Now, by "pure" what is meant in critical philosophy is that it is independent of lived-experience: hence, there is, for example, a sense of a pure objectivity in mathematical signs. It is not, therefore, a question of evaluation or interpretation or of a subjective context. The pure signifying (*bedeuten*) act produces a sign that possesses a pure objectively valid signification (*Bedeutung*) that stands beyond the subjective context of its use. The pure mathematical sign as pure sign, of course, also possesses a certain significance in that it is understood by a subject as a pure mathematical sign that is important in a given context: pure signification thus possesses a certain significance that determines it. In the case of other modes of sense-bestowing, the sign is bound to a historical subjective context that determines its *Bedeutung*.

Take a religious sign or ritual, for example. It is possible to understand the objective signification (*Bedeutung*) of a religious sign or ritual without having access to their lived significance (*Bedeutung*), which only

takes place in a historically concrete subjective situation. Here, the true signification of the religious sign or ritual is its significance for a subject in a lived context whose sense constitutes a religious lived-experience and not an aesthetic one. Where the same religious sign is encountered outside of the lived context in which it obtains its religious significance, when, for example, it is seen only as an aesthetic ornament, it loses its religious significance and gains an aesthetic one. This said, we can still speak, for example, of the signification of the religious sign within a specific religious tradition. Here, however, we have moved the religious sign from the religious context into that of the scientific context that determines its pure objective signification independently of the context of the lived-experience of religious consciousness. Religious studies, as a science of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*), has as its factum a scientific experience and thus is itself not the lived-experience of a religious praxis; it provides an objective factual account of the system of significations of religious signs and rituals that make up a religion but which are, from the perspective of religious consciousness, entirely void of significance. The significance of a sign is its signification, and while the nature of this *Bedeutung* is determined by the sense (*Sinn*) of the symbolic form as a mode of *Bedeutung* – be it religious, mythical, aesthetic, linguistic, or scientific – it is also determined by a historical subjective context. And in the case of the pure signs of science, this historical subjective context is increasingly negated in an attempt to create a system of pure signs that provides a system of pure signification.

(iv) Symbolic Pregnance and Cassirer's Critique of Immediate Presence

In volume 3, Cassirer establishes the role of the sense-function in the construction of concrete lived intuition, perception, and cognition of ourselves, others, and the world as well as a scientific thinking that posits the pure relational system of signs as a mode of pure signification. The issue now arises about the nature of the "immediately given." To express the incarnated symbolic value of intuition, perception, emotion, and cognition, Cassirer introduces the concept of symbolic pregnance to designate how "a lived-perceptive-experience, as a 'sensible' lived-experience, *always already* contains in itself at the same time a certain non-intuitive 'sense' and brings it to immediate concrete presentation."[29]

The term "pregnance" is borrowed from gestalt psychology and designates the lawful process in the formation of visual objects through the recognition of a pattern, a holistic image, that is pregnant in individual parts determining and conditioning them. The gestalt experience is a holistic one. In the case of Cassirer, the whole that is experienced is that of the symbolic form that provides the sense of a "sensible" lived-experience. In "Structuralism in Modern Linguistics" (1945), Cassirer remarks that when "Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, approaches those problems that in our modern scientific terminology we should call '*Gestaltprobleme*,' he does not use the German word. He goes back to the Greek term *σχῆμα* and writes his chapter on the schematism of the pure understanding."[30] For Kant, the imagination unites the sensible and intellectual components that make experience possible through schematization. The sensible schema is the rule of synthesis employed in the production of sensible figures as the mediation of the sensible and conceptual. These sensible schemata are the "monogram" of the productive imagination, and they provide the basic outline or gestalt that present the concept in sensible form. Kant gives the examples of a triangle and a dog. The schema provides the gestalt figure of the generic elements of the concept of dog: four-legged, furry, etc. And in fact, Kant does employ the term "gestalt" in this context. In the case of symbolic pregnance, it is a question of how concepts are given a sensible form according to a specific horizon of sense-bestowing.

In Cassirer's examples of symbolic pregnance, the sensible figure acts as a bearer of diverse modes of signification (*Bedeutung*) depending on the horizon of sense (*Sinn*) in which it is situated and by which it is understood.

> [The sensible figure's] pure visibility [*Sichtbarkeit*] is never to be thought outside and independently of a certain form of "sight" [*Sicht*]; as a "sensible" [*sinnlich*] lived-experience it is always the bearer of a sense [*Sinn*] and stands as it were in the service of that sense. Precisely in this way, however, it is able to perform very different functions and by virtue of them to "represent" [*vorstellig macht*] very different worlds of sense [*Sinnwelten*].[31]

Whereas Kant posits the transcendental apperception as the condition of the possibility of perception, Cassirer, in moving from a substantial condition to a functional condition, goes beyond Kant and argues that signification and existence are moments in the sense-function that cannot

be separated. As we have already seen, the logical status or validity of the difference between the signification and the existence of the content of intuition, perception, emotion, or cognition cannot be understood to represent an ontic difference in being. Symbolic pregnance thus goes beyond the classical one-sided metaphysical presuppositions of both rationalism and empiricism that separate signification (thinking) from existence (being) and as a consequence always ends in unresolvable antinomies. Symbolic pregnance is a generalization and reformulation of that "ultimate originary-relationship [*Urverhältnis*]" we saw earlier between "form" and "content," "universal" and "particular," "validity" and "being." As Cassirer states in *Substance and Function*:

> the possibility disappears of separating the "matter" of cognition from its "form" by referring them each to a different origin in absolute being. . . . Matter is only with reference to form, while form, on the other hand, is valid only in relation to matter.[32]

Symbolic pregnance, however, is not a generalization of the mathematical function: rather, the mathematical function is an extension and manifestation of the more originary symbolic function that operates at the core of all presencing.

Cassirer makes his critique of the metaphysics of presence (the immediately given) by way of a critique of Husserl, whose whole project of phenomenology seeks to move beyond metaphysical questions. Husserl distinguishes within consciousness between an element [*Element*] of sensible experience (the hyle) and an element [*Element*] of intentionality or meaning (the morphe). When Husserl then inquires, however, into how the two elements [*Elemente*] can be brought together and form a meaningful whole, he deviates, Cassirer maintains, from the very principles of his own philosophy that equates sense with the whole of consciousness. Cassirer expresses the interconnection between the two elements [*Momente*] of symbolic pregnance and thus of intentionality, by considering the fundamental sensory lived-experience as *always already* determined and configured by the various "symbolic forms."

> If we may distinguish, by employing Husserl's terminology, between the sensory material and "animating acts," between the sensual *ὕλη* [hylé] and intentional *μορφή* [morphé], this abstract *difference* can never

> mean that these may be *separated* in the phenomenon or that in itself formless matter, which is gradually taken up into various forms of sense-bestowing and subsequently configured by them, is given. . . . For us, in any case, it is certain that pure phenomenological "sensation" and "sense-bearing" are only given as an indivisible unity. We can never completely separate the sensory as such, as some naked "raw material" of sensation, from the whole complex of sense.[33]

Each of the corresponding elements [*Momente*] in the "dualism" must not be understood according to the reifying and hypostatizing tendency of classical metaphysical ontology as autonomous entities possessing their own self-identical substantial existence that must, somehow, be related and joined together.

> This dialectic of the metaphysical theory of being can be avoided only if, from the very start, "content" and "form," "element" [*Element*] and "relation" are not comprehended as independent determinations of each other, but appear as given together with one another and thought of in a reciprocal determination. . . . Only in and through this representation [*Repräsentation*] does what we call the givenness and "presence" [*Präsenz*] of the content become possible. . . . Only because we are able in this way to hold onto a not-being [*Nicht-Seiendes*] within the actual being [*Sein*] of consciousness, are we able to hold onto the not-given within the given – does there exist for us that unity that we designate on the one hand as the subjective unity of consciousness and, on the other, as the objective unity of the object.[34]

In a quotation that could have been found in *Voice and Phenomena*, Cassirer concludes his critique of the metaphysics of the given: "For no content of consciousness in itself is merely 'present' [*präsent*], nor it is in itself merely 'representative' [*repräsentativ*]; rather, every actual lived-experience subsumes both moments within itself in an insoluble unity. Every presence [*Gegenwärtige*] functions as re-presentation [*Vergegenwärtigung*], as every re-presentation [*Vergegenwärtigung*] requires a link to a presence [*Gegenwärtige*] in consciousness."[35] As Rudolf Bernet has pointed out:

> That function of representation which is common to perception, image-consciousness, and the manner in which a sign refers to a signified,

> effaces the opposition between "presentation" (*Gegenwärtigung*) and "re-presentation" (*Vergegenwärtigung*) on which Husserl's entire theory of perception rests.[36]

It does, however, because Husserl has departed here from his own radical association of sense with consciousness and returned to a traditional metaphysical dualism, which is the real target of Cassirer's critique.

(v) The Neo-Hegelian Slant of Cassirer's Critique of Culture

Thus far, we have presented Cassirer's "critique of culture" within the general framework of the neo-Kantian project of a transcendental theory of culture.[37] There is, however, a clear Hegelian undertone to the critique of culture that is important to recognize.

(a) Determinative Negativity, Auseinandersetzung*, and the Logic of the Symbolic Function*

Although Cassirer never explicitly designates or defines the term "*Auseinandersetzung*" as a *terminus technicus*, it is clear that it operates in Cassirer's work as a *vox signata* and goes to the core of his conception of symbolic reality. Each symbolic form is said to participate in the "great *Auseinandersetzung* of the I and the world" according to its own sense of objectivity. Each symbolic form is said to constitute itself only in and through its *Auseinandersetzung* with each of the other symbolic forms; science and philosophy, for example, come about in and through their *Auseinandersetzung* with the linguistic and mythical worlds and by setting themselves in dialectic opposition to both. Historical epochs also constitute themselves in and through an *Auseinandersetzung* with other historical epochs. Finally, all truly philosophical thought comes about in and through an *Auseinandersetzung* with the thought of other thinkers.

Auseinandersetzung designates an encounter, a discussion, a debate, a division or separation, a conflict, a confrontation, a polemic, a war, a strife, a battle or clash. One can speak, e.g., of an *Auseinandersetzung* between protesters and the police or of an *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel's philosophy. Both Cassirer and Heidegger, e.g., refer to their 1929 debate at Davos as an *Auseinandersetzung*. *Auseinandersetzung* was originally a

legal term that referred to the settling or settlement of legal relations between individuals divided in a conflict over some common property in which both had a share, as in the case of a debtor and their creditors. An *Auseinandersetzung* is the strife that divides and unites two antagonistic positions of a conflictual relationship of opposition. The *Auseinandersetzung* only appears at first to have a negative and defensive character: in truth, it is productive of the positions. Thus, it is not that two already-existing unrelated positions clash but that the positions themselves are a product of the strife of opposition and thus exist only in the unity of their antithetical opposition to each other. Like the *Auseinandersetzung*, the symbolic is the "in-between" that differentiates as it integrates. It is composed of *Auseinander* and *Setzung*. *Auseinander* signifies that things differ, are apart or asunder. *Setzung* is the substantive form of *setzen* (to set or to posit) and therefore signifies a setting or positing. Thus, we have the idea of a setting apart or putting asunder. For German idealism, what reason posits (*setzt*) as true is a law (*Gesetz*). *Auseinander* can be further broken down into three parts: *aus* (out of/from), *ein* (one), and *ander* (other). In this way, *Aus-ein-ander-setzung* becomes a (lawful) setting asunder of one out of/from another that takes place and manifests itself only in and through the strife of a confrontational encounter: a *polemos*, Heraclitus says. The logos of opposites of Heraclitus operates at the heart of Cassirer's entire philosophical outlook. The unity of reality, be it of the symbolic, the world, or the human, is for Cassirer "*a dialectic unity, a coexistence of contraries*."[38]

As we have seen, the reification and hypostatization tendency of classical metaphysical ontology posits entities as self-identical substantial existents. This logic of self-identity repeatedly takes the duality of "elements" [*Momente*] of the symbolic function as a duality of self-identical and autonomous "elements" [*Elemente*] existing in separate worlds, which no amount of mediation can bridge. As a result, substantial metaphysics always ends in antinomies. For Cassirer, there is no outside the symbolic. The duality within being is a duality of sight, a duality of logical validity within the symbolic itself and not an ontic-ontological duality. Cassirer's theory of the symbolic thus goes beyond classical substantialist metaphysics and the ontology of self-identity by replacing a substantialist with a functional unity of self-contradictory oppositions. What the concept of *Auseinandersetzung* adds to Cassirer's understanding of the symbolic

function is the element of negation that functions as a productive negativity that introduces an identity-in-difference that cannot be sublated, that is unsublatable – an identity of self-contradictory elements. In this productive negativity, we find one of the Hegelian tenets of Cassirer's critique of culture.

Hegel, at first sight, seems to break from the ontology of self-identity: within the logic of being, something is what it is because it is not something else. It possesses an identity-in-difference: "Being" is because it is not "nothing"; identity is because it is not difference. Hegel introduces the "determinate negativity" of difference into the forming and configuring of being. In the final analysis, however, the determinate negativity is domesticated and proves to be only a logical moment in a more encompassing ontological identity. Every identity-in-difference is "sublated" (*aufgehoben*) into a higher ontological reality. This *Aufgehoben*, this "negation of the negation," continues until all difference has been sublated into the identity of Absolute spirit until all reality has taken the form of an "identity of identity-and-difference." Absolute spirit is, in the final analysis, a "being-in-and-for-itself"; it is both Substance and Subject – a "living substance," as Hegel calls it. "Absolute spirit, while an identity that is eternally self-contained, is likewise an identity that is returning and has returned into itself" (Hegel 1991, § 554).

Within the logic of the symbolic, the *Auseinandersetzung* forms a complex relational operation in which the oppositions of difference coexist as the mutually defining and opposing limits of each other; each is defined in its being, not through some self-identical essence that it contains in itself, nor by being a logical moment or element in a higher, overarching ontological identity, but through the strife of opposition as the confrontation with the limit of the other it is not. Consequently, each element carries within itself the trace of the other, the other who remains absolutely other, which defines its position in the play of differences; or, in Hegelian terminology, it is the determinative negativity that sets apart and yet constitutes the relationship of belonging-together in the opposition of thesis and antithesis that operates within the identity-in-difference of the symbolic function but which cannot be sublated into a higher ontological identity as the identity of identity and difference – i.e., as moments or elements within a pure ontological self-identity. In opposition to the logic of a substantialist ontology of self-identity where something is what it is because it is

self-identical to itself and is thus both in-itself and conceived through itself: here, something "is" because it is not something else and thus can be conceived only in opposition to what it is not. The logic of this *Auseinandersetzung* of the symbolic function frustrates the classical logic of the substantialist ontology of self-identity as the arché and logos of being.

(b) Culture Is Said in Many Ways: Hegel, Cohen, and Cassirer

The philosophy of symbolic forms is a critique of culture: however, culture is said in many ways, and we must pause to make clear what is being spoken about when we employ the term "culture," because there are similarities and dissimilarities in Hegel's use, Cohen's use, and Cassirer's use. It is important to realize that there are at least three synonymic German translations for the English term "culture": *Kultur*, *Geist*, and *Bildung*.

For Hegel, culture (*Kultur*) designates the finite historical existence of a social community such as the Athenian Greeks. *Geist* is the essential energy, the active essence (*Wesen*) that undertakes the *Bildung* of individuals into the unity of a culture (*Kultur*). *Bildung* designates the processes and reality of the objectification of *Geist* and can be translated as "training," "cultivation," or "formation," depending on the context. Through *Bildung*, the individual is subjugated into the different levels and stages of objective spirit; thus, *Bildung* is the ethical *training* of the child in the family; the *cultivation* of the individual into the language, customs, etc. of civil society; and the *formation* of the individual as a member of the state as the highest manifestation of Reason in the world. As such, however, the objectification of Reason in the forms of objective spirit, and with it the process of *Bildung*, always contains a moment of estrangement (*Entfremdung*). For, while objective spirit is the manifestation (*Äußerung*) of Reason, Reason does not recognize in these products its own activity. This estrangement can be overcome only in and through absolute spirit – that is, through art, religion, and philosophy as the reflective modes of Reason in which Reason moves toward the overcoming of its alienation in that Reason as the logic of being comes to know itself as the whole of being. For Hegel, Absolute spirit, Reason, is thus the *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of the historical process that *is* the being of reality as a whole; for the truth is the whole.

The Hegelian nature of Cassirer's project becomes clear if we ask whether culture for Cassirer is the *terminus a quo* or the *terminus ad quem* of the historical process. For Cohen and Natorp, culture is clearly the *terminus ad quem* of self-conscious rational consciousness. Artistic creation, theology, and philosophy are the moments of the self-awareness of human rationality as they were in Hegel's Absolute spirit. For Cassirer, the situation is more complex: it would seem that life and culture are both the *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of the historical process.

There are at least three basic senses of culture operating in Cassirer's work. Like Hegel, *Geist* is, for Cassirer, the essential energy, the active essence (*Wesen*) that undertakes the *Bildung* of individuals into the unity of a culture (*Kultur*). The first sense of culture refers to the ensemble of the cultural forms that makes up the whole life of spirit in which we always already find ourselves. There is no outside the symbolic for Cassirer, no pre-symbolic existence of the human: we are always already immanent within the symbolic and conditioned by it. This larger sense of culture as the whole is thus the truth of cultural life and as such must be seen as a type of *terminus a quo*.

This brings us to the metaphysics of the symbolic as grounded in the *Urphänome* of life. In "'Life' and 'Spirit,'" we see that Cassirer takes up the young Hegel's concept of life. However, already in the introduction to volume 3, Cassirer writes:

> A *self-awareness* [*Selbsterfassung*] of life is only possible if it does not simply *remain* absolutely within itself. It must give itself form; for it is precisely by this "alterity" of form that it gains if not its reality then its "visibility." To detach the world of life absolutely from the world of form and oppose the two means nothing other than to separate its "reality" from its "visibility." . . . Must all form as such necessarily signify concealment rather than manifestation [*Ausprägung*] and revelation?[39]

This oft-quoted citation of Cassirer goes to the heart of the metaphysics of the symbolic. The question posits Hegel for whom form is the manifestation [*Ausprägung*] of life against *Lebensphilosophie* for which form is the concealment of life. In "'Life' and 'Spirit,'" Cassirer quotes Hegel and then goes on to make his position clear:

> "The force [*Kraft*] of spirit is only as great as its expression and manifestation [*Äußerung*], its depth is only as deep as it dares to spread out and

> lose itself in its exposition [*Auslegung*: interpretation]." The realization of this principle demands not only that spirit and life come to know themselves as opposites, but that, at the same time, on account of this very opposition, they seek and demand each other. The polarity between the two remains, but it loses its *semblance* of absolute estrangement [*Entfremdung*].[40]

Life, for Cassirer, is never the "formless life" of the *élan vital* of Bergson, any more than culture is the dead product of Simmel. The question is how "the transcendence of the idea [can] be reconciled with the immanence of life."[41] The sense (*Sinn*) of life is always an organized structured living-experience (*Erlebnis*) of significance and purpose. Even if Cassirer disagrees with the ultimate pessimism of Simmel's view of the tragedy of culture, he agrees with Simmel's basic assessment of life. For Cassirer, "life's actual movement consists in the oscillation between two extreme phases. It is never at one with itself except by being beyond itself at the same time."[42] It is, Cassirer says, quoting Simmel, "at once flux without pause and yet something enclosed in bearers and contents, formed about midpoints, individualized, and therefore always a bounded configuration [*Gestaltung*] which continually jumps its bounds. [In short, it is an] 'immanent transcendence in life.'"[43] "In this inner and necessary duality," Cassirer sees that "life seems to be not only the original source of Geist but also its archetype and prototype. For *the same* duality is present in a newly heightened figure [*Gestalt*] in the being of Geist."[44] Cassirer parts paths with Simmel and Bergson, however, in that the fatal dichotomy that they posit between life and spirit is foreign to his entire philosophical outlook: "We meet up with completely formless life as seldom as we meet up with a completely lifeless form."[45] The life of cultural form is the cultural form of life.

> Life and form, continuity and individuality, diverge radically as soon as we take one of them to be absolute as soon as we see in them different metaphysical kinds of being. But this gulf is closed if we instead put ourselves in the midst of the concrete process of *formation* and its *dynamics*, if we take the opposition of the two aspects as an opposition not of beings, but of pure functions. . . . The apparent dualism, the rupture in the fabric in "existence," (*Riss im "Dasein"*) is in truth nothing other than the result of a necessary duality of "sight" ("*Sicht*"). This means that life, without breaking away from itself, without becoming

> absolutely "beside itself" ("*ausser sich*": outside itself), has become transparent and *objective* to itself.[46]

The life of culture is an ever-renewing immanent transcendence, a constant process of coming into being. Each symbolic form contributes to the internal differentiation and configuration of the presencing of life in this movement from "mere being-in-itself to being-for-itself." The "turn to idea" comes from within life itself, from a "trend toward idea" (*Zug zur Idea*) that exists originally within itself, which brings life to its own self-disclosure, its own "visibility."

> [This] "turn to idea" cannot be described as life bidding itself farewell in order to go forth into something foreign and distant from itself; rather, life must be seen as returning to itself, it "comes to itself" in the medium of the symbolic forms.[47]

Life as a cultural life is thus a historical process of self-realization in a twofold sense: in the sense of its self-actualization and in the sense of its self-awakening. The life of culture thus must be understood as the *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of the historical process.

This brings us to the second sense of culture, which refers to the reflective forms of spirit that are cognizant of their creative energies. The productive imagination and reproductive imagination, the construction and reconstruction of the world, *cannot coexist in thought at one and the same moment*. Language and art form the primary originary forms of objectification, and myth is both the pre-*reflective* and the sub-*reflective* life of spirit. Art, religion, and science are the three symbolic forms that form the reflexive self-cognizant activity of spirit's self-understanding. And while each of these symbolic forms is cognizant of its own formative activity, they do not understand themselves as cultural forms of formation (*Bildung*). This occurs in philosophy, in particular in the philosophy of symbolic forms in which the concept of life and culture is the *terminus ad quem*. The philosophy of symbolic forms is thus also a phenomenology of culture in which the life of spirit comes to its own self-awareness in the concept of culture. This might be one reason why Cassirer changed the title of the project from *The Phenomenology of Cognition* to *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*: the phenomenology of cognition is now situated in the

larger project of a critique of culture that provides the logic of objective spirit.

On the one hand, the logic of spirit moves progressively toward its own self-realization through a recognition of its own activity in the objective products of its productive activity. Cassirer speaks of each symbolic form as moving through three stages or levels: mimetic expression, analogical expression, and symbolic expression. And the whole system of the symbolic moves through three stages or levels: expression, presentation, and pure signification. Cassirer employs the Hegelian terms "*Moment*" and "*Stufe*," which refer at once to a permanent structural element (*Moment*) that forms a level (*Stufe*) of sense that marks a moment (*Moment*) in the historical process of the manifestation (*Äußerung*) of spirit as a stage (*Stufe*) in its becoming cognizant of its own activity. The earlier stages and levels of expression and myth are not negated and left behind but sublated in and through the critical turn of culture toward its self-understanding. In fundamental agreement, Cassirer quotes Hegel:

> The life of present spirit [*gegenwärtigen Geist*] is a cycle of stages which on the one hand still exist next to one another and only on the other hand appears as past. The moments [*Momente*] that spirit seems to have left behind it, it has in its present depths [*gegenwärtigen Tiefe*].[48]

On the other hand, because there is no substantial pre-existing ground as in the case of Hegel, the cultural process is open-ended and unending. It is open-ended in that the functional unity of the symbolic determines the sense of language, art, myth, religion, and science but not the concrete significance or signification of an historically concrete-cultural event. This is why we can orient ourselves in another culture: we can understand the sense of the different modes of understanding a world, even if we do not understand the particular world that these modes create. We can understand that the person before us is speaking a language even if we do not understand the signification of what is being expressed; and even if we do understand the linguistic signification, we do not necessarily grasp the significance of what is said, because we do not live in the world that this language opens up; we are able to mechanically repeat a ritual act without being able to enter into the subjectivity that the performance constructs. We see that, like Hegel, Cassirer turns to different cultures to

provide ideal examples of the work of the cultural forms as the creative dynamics of life and spirit; though, in difference to Hegel, there is no attempt to set out a metanarrative of the logic of worldspirit that situates these different cultures into the logic of Absolute spirit as it unfolds in world history. The logic of culture does not move, as in Hegel, to a dialectical conclusion. Rather, Cassirer speaks of the "drama" of history.

The functional unity of Cassirer's theory of culture allows, therefore, for a plurality of worlds that are substantially different while providing a common logic of sense that is constitutive of the transcendental structure of every possible human world. And the cultural process is unending, because there is no concrete culture that would bring the cultural process to an end. There is no end to the creativity of spirit to form new modes of being and thus no cultural event whose self-understanding would sublate all other cultural events, all other modes of being human.

This brings us to the third sense of culture operating in Cassirer's work. Culture, as we will see in the next section (4.5), also refers to the facticity of a unique historical existence, to a specific *Weltverständnis* as a radically unique cultural event possessing its own sense of life that is expressed in the style of a unique *zeitgeist* that constitutes a "unity of direction" or a "common task" that is unlike any other cultural event: what Hegel designated as *Kultur*.

4.5 – A Turn to Facticity and the Response to a Socio-Political Crisis

By the end of the 1920s, Cassirer's thinking had begun a "turn" that would lead him into two problem domains that, strictly speaking, lay beyond the reach of the project of a transcendental critique of culture. First, as Krois argues, there is a "turn to metaphysics."[49] Cassirer now sought "to explicate the metaphysical basis of the symbolic forms." This turn grew out of Cassirer's efforts to engage the basic philosophical tenets of *Lebensphilosophie*. Although Cassirer continued to work on his metaphysics of the symbolic well into the 1930s, this work was never published in Cassirer's lifetime. Second, the turn in Cassirer's thinking brings his philosophy closer and closer to critical theory as an application of the project of the philosophy of symbolic forms to the facticity of his own culture.

(i) Cassirer's Historical Thrownness: The Crisis in Human Self-Understanding and the Construction of a Non-Subject-Centered Symbolic Humanism

One did not have to wait for the events of 1933 to understand the historical situation: like many, Cassirer was fully cognizant of the socio-political crisis that had for many years been unfolding. From the beginning of the late 1920s, Cassirer turned to an analysis of this socio-political crisis, to determining its source, and to combating it in the only way he knew how: through a philosophical construction of an open non-subject-centered symbolic humanism based on an understanding of the creative forces of spirit. Here more than anywhere, Cassirer seems to speak of and to our contemporary socio-political preoccupations.

Cassirer was concerned by the growing cultural pessimism that he considered to be inherent in the position of *Lebensphilosophie*, and from 1930 on, Cassirer repeatedly engaged its basic tenets. In *The Myth of the State*, Cassirer criticized the philosophical tendency that manifested itself most notably in Spengler's work *Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*) and in Heidegger's concept of *Geworfenheit* (thrownness). Admittedly, neither Spengler nor Heidegger had directly brought about the political ideas and events of Nazi Germany, but the basic tendency of the direction of their ideas had

> enfeebled and slowly undermined the forces that could have resisted the modern political myths. A philosophy of history that consists in somber predictions of the decline and the inevitable destruction of our *civilization* and a theory that sees in the *Geworfenheit* [thrownness] of man one of his principal characters have given up all hopes of an active share in the *construction and reconstruction of man's cultural life*. Such philosophy renounces its own fundamental theoretical and ethical ideals.[50]

The crisis, as Cassirer argues in the opening chapter of *An Essay on Man*, is a crisis in human self-understanding brought about by the failure of philosophy. The question, "What is the human?" is not one philosophical question among others: it is *the* philosophical question *par excellence*, whose answer determines human self-understanding and by extension the human understanding of the world. This understanding determines the sense of our actions and our socio-political institutions. The source of

the crisis is the failure of philosophy to remain true to its vocation of establishing a normative concept of the human around which the critical forces that seek the reflective and critical self-understanding of the human – be they aesthetic, theoretical, or ethical – can be organized and fostered.

"Of all the sad experiences of these last twelve years," Cassirer writes in *The Myth of the State*, "the most dreadful" was to have seen his colleagues, "men of education and intelligence, honest and upright men . . . suddenly give up the highest human privilege. They [had] ceased to be free and personal agents."[51] The force of critical reason, weakened by the "cultural pessimism" of the times, had failed to fulfill its theoretical and ethical duty in the moment that it had been most urgently needed. In his inaugural address at the University of Göteborg in 1935, Cassirer already spoke of the problem of the "unity of knowledge" and of the "failure" of philosophy to achieve its ethical vocation: "in the hour of peril" Cassirer said, quoting Schweitzer, "the watchman slept, who should have kept watch over us. So, it happened that we did not *struggle* for our culture."[52] Cassirer means to say "we" – for as remarkable as it is, Cassirer held himself responsible for the decline of reason:

> I do not exclude myself and I do not absolve myself. While endeavoring on behalf of the scholastic conception of philosophy . . . we have all too frequently lost sight of the true connection of philosophy with the world. But today we can no longer keep our eyes closed to the menacing danger. Today the urgency of the time warns us more strongly and more imperatively than ever that there is once again a question for philosophy which involves its ultimate and highest decisions. Is there really something like an objective theoretical truth, and is there something like that which earlier generations have understood as the ideal of morality, of humanity? . . . In a time in which such questions can be raised, philosophy cannot stand aside, mute and idle. If ever, now is the time for it again to reflect on itself, on that which it is and what it has been, on its systematic, fundamental purpose, and on its spiritual-historical past.[53]

The crisis, therefore, stems from a failure of philosophy to establish a regulatory idea of the human being that would ground human self-knowledge and a culture of critical thought and action that could resist a culture of pessimism, a culture of fear and resignation that marks the rise of the myth of the modern totalitarian state. Cassirer's turn from

systematic philosophy to a philosophical anthropology is a return to the ethos of philosophy. Cassirer's thinking now turns more and more to a critique of the facticity of his historical situatedness, to rethinking the project of philosophy, and to establishing a concept of ethical and creative freedom that could function as a regulative ideal in the inception of a neo-enlightenment culture in an age of growing darkness.

(ii) "Form and Technology" (Form and Freedom): A Critique of Contemporary Culture

In "Form and Technology" (1930), Cassirer engages contemporary *Lebensphilosophie* on an "urgent" contemporary issue: the growing "primacy" and dominance of "modern technology" and the construction of the contemporary "technological culture" that is undermining those critical forces (in particular philosophy) and bringing about the "*alienation* of human beings from their own essence" and the fact that "today, many consider this *subjugation* the ultimate goal of modern culture and its *inevitable fate*."[54]

Cassirer's approach to the question concerning technology is to provide an epistemo-critical analysis of its spiritual form and determine its nature and limits. In many respects, this is a continuation of the critique of culture. The form of "modern technology" is, however, a historically specific form, and this sets it off from the forms that are analyzed in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, which as the conditions of the possibility of culture are necessarily universal to all human existence: wherever one finds the human, one finds a linguistic-aesthetic being living out its mythical sense of life, caught up in the dialectic of the immanence-transcendence of self-awakening or enlightenment. The phenomenon of "modern technology," however, is a specific thought-form that defines a particular historical culture, namely "technological culture." Perhaps for this reason, Cassirer does not actually say that technology is a symbolic form *tout court*. We have here the historicization of the transcendental *a priori* form. Technology can be a source of liberation and need not involve the alienation of the worker. The problem, it turns out, is not with technology *itself* but with a

> certain form and order of an economic system and that every attempt at improvement must begin here. This connection does not originate in the spirit of technology. It is more the case that this spirit is made

> necessary and thrust upon one by a particular situation, by concrete-historical circumstances.[55]

What is necessary, Cassirer concludes, is to render technology ethical so that it is employed for the betterment of life and does not end in the alienation of the worker.

We are not interested here in unpacking Cassirer's analysis of technology. What is important for our purposes is only to illustrate the direction that Cassirer's thinking takes in the 1930s: toward an epistemo-critical analysis of the facticity of culture or of the concrete-historical circumstances of a specific mode of thinking that defines a unique cultural event – in this case, "technological culture" or, as it turns out, "a certain form and order of an economic system" that defines the concrete-historical facticity of our times.

(iii) The Historical (Re)construction of the Humanism of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment

In a flurry of "historical" studies in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Cassirer pens four seminal works on the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The aim of historical thought for Cassirer is to develop a "new understanding of the past" that "gives us at the same time a new prospect of the future, which in turn becomes an impulse to intellectual and social life." A genuine renaissance of the past does not simply repeat it but instead penetrates the historical works of the past to revitalize the creative energies that gave expression to these works. A historical reconstruction, then, is not a passive transition and preservation of the past but a triumph of spontaneity and a moment of that twofold self-realization spoken of earlier:

> Whenever a subject – whether an individual or a whole epoch – is prepared to forget itself, in order to be absorbed by another and completely give itself away: then it always finds itself in a new and deeper sense.[56]

These works must be read in light of Cassirer's historical situatedness and as a manifesto of an open symbolic humanism for his (our) time.

On the eve of the Third Reich and the birth of fascism in which the Aryan race as the *Herrenvolk* (master race) was placed at the center of the cosmic order, displacing all others as subhuman to the margins, Cassirer returns in *Individual and Cosmos in the Renaissance* to Pico's "The Dignity of the Human" and writes:

> The dignity of the human cannot reside in its being, i.e., in the place allotted to the human once and for all in the cosmic order. The hierarchical system subdivides the world into different levels and places each being in one of these levels as its rightful place in the universe. But such a view does not grasp *the sense and the problem of human freedom*.[57]

As a charismatic cultural hero spoke of the greatness of the German *Volk*, of its "spiritual" and "divine creation," and of its "historic mission," Cassirer argued in *The Case of Jacques Rousseau* for a concept of freedom and individual responsibility that was based on a rational and ethical foundation:

> The human cannot be relieved of the task of ordering its world; and in shaping and guiding it, the human neither can nor ought to rely on help from above, on supernatural assistance. The task has been put to the human – who must solve it with its own, purely human means. But precisely as the human penetrates into the character of the problem before it, it acquires the certainty that its self is not confined to the limits of the world of sense. *From immanence and from ethical autonomy, the human now pushes forward into the core of 'intelligible' being*.[58]

As people began to believe in German "exceptionalism" (*Sonderweg*), Cassirer provided in *The Platonic Renaissance in England* a genealogy of the ideas of humanism from Italian humanism to the Cambridge Platonists and their influence on Lessing, Herder, Goethe, Schiller, and Kant – thus reminding people of the importance of this tradition in the work of the principle architects of German culture. In Cassirer's account of Shaftesbury's apology for humor, we find the "liberating, life-giving, and life-forming power of the soul"[59] that constitutes the good life that can combat the cynicism of a totalitarian discourse of pessimism and fatalism that constructs a culture of fear: in humor, as Cassirer writes in *An*

Essay on Man, "things and events begin to lose their material weight; scorn is dissolved into laughter and laughter is liberation."[60]

In his seminal work, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, Cassirer provides a forceful defense of the role and function of critical philosophy in the construction of an enlightenment culture, not a "shallow Enlightenment" but a profound creative *Zeitalter der Kritik* of which the Enlightenment was but a historical example. On the eve of madness, thrown into a winter of despair, a voice spoke out in the name of reason against the decline (*Untergang*) of civilization and an unquestioning resignation to a pessimistic fatalism:

> *More than ever before, it seems to me, the time is again ripe* for applying . . . self-criticism to the present age, for holding up to it that bright clear mirror fashioned by the Enlightenment. . . . The slogan: *Sapere aude* (think for oneself) . . . also holds for our own historical relation to that period. Instead of assuming a *derogatory* air, we must take courage and measure our powers against those of the age of the Enlightenment and find a proper adjustment. The age which venerated reason and science as the human's highest faculty cannot and must not be lost even for us. *We must find a way not only to see that age in its own shape but to release again those original forces which brought forth and molded this shape*.[61]

(iv) The Logic of the Cultural Sciences

In *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences* (1942), Cassirer's turn to the facticity of culture brings the philosophy of symbolic forms to a new project: the establishment of a philosophy of culture based on a cultural anthropology that lays the foundations for the cultural sciences (*Kulturwissenschaften*), understood as an interdisciplinary field of research that investigates not only the modes in and through which a concrete-historical "culture" creates and transforms individual experiences, everyday life, and social relations but also how concrete-historical individuals create and transform their culture. The concrete-cultural sciences (*Kulturwissenschaften*) cannot be separated from the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), nor can a philosophy of culture as a cultural anthropology be separated from a critique of culture. In the context of a critique of culture as an epistemo-critical

analysis of the sense-bestowing forms of objective spirit (*Geist*), Cassirer spoke of a "life 'in' sense": in the case of the logic of the cultural sciences, the epistemo-critical analysis concerns the facticity of a particular cultural event (what was *Kultur* for Hegel) and the existential situation of a *zeitgeist* that grounds it, and so here Cassirer speaks of a "life in significations." The two levels are linked through the historical *schematic horizons* of *Stilbegriffen* (style-concepts) that represent the "pure 'being'" of symbolic forms.[62] The critique of culture must determine and organize the various "cardinal directions" of the "symbolic function" as it unfolds in human culture, and "it is the totality of these structures that identifies and distinguishes the specifically human world."[63] A symbolic form is a particular mode and direction of objectification, an energy of objective spirit. The cultural sciences, through the use of form-concepts taken from the critique of culture and its own style-concepts, must determine and organize the divergent directions that determine the concrete being of a cultural process: "Each particular cultural science develops certain concepts of form and style and uses them to establish a systematic survey, a classification and differentiation of the phenomena with which it concerns itself."[64] The form-concepts and style-concepts of the sciences of culture possess a certain "characteristic indeterminateness that they are unable to overcome."[65] Cassirer illustrates this by way of Jacob Burckhardt's classic portrayal of the Renaissance individual. No one individual living during the Renaissance embodies all of the qualities contained in Burckhardt's concept. If we consider the individuals of a culture, we "perceive them to be not only thoroughly different, but even opposed."[66]

> [However,] this opposition notwithstanding, and indeed perhaps just through it, they stand in a certain ideal connection to one another; that each in his or her own way cooperates in the construction of what we call the 'spirit' of the Renaissance or the culture of the Renaissance.[67]

The style-concepts of culture thus represent a "unity of direction," a "common task," not a "unity of being." They "characterize" but do not "determine" the individuals. What is more, this "common task" does not level all individuals down into the same; rather, they possess an identity-in-difference; they belong together in and through their difference to each other. The aim of the sciences of culture is to establish the structure

and form of this common task and activity that defines a concrete-historical cultural event.

A few things should be emphasized. First, Cassirer introduces here a new concept: "style" as the concrete historical existence of form. Cassirer speaks of the style of art, language, thinking, science, an epoch, and a culture. But what is "style"? Paradoxically put, style is an idiosyncratic and historical-transcendental structure that determines the unique, intelligible form of the becoming of a particular concrete existence – be it the existence of an idea, a mode of thinking, a people, an epoch, or an individual: to speak with Comte de Buffon, "*le style c'est l'homme même*."[68] As such, a style-concept is an open regulative idea, a schematic horizon, that provides the teleological trajectory of human history and thus guides but does not determine human creativity. Because style is only a regulative idea of a future possibility, there is a certain indeterminacy in the being of a culture as in the being of an individual, a creative freedom to interpret the regulatory idea actualizing it through a wide variety of diverse expressions.

Art, for example, is a sense-bestowing symbolic form: the Baroque is a style that defines a historical period; the style of Caravaggio is a further extension, interpretation, and concretization that expresses itself in his artworks. And the dynamic process of determining the sense and significance of art, the Baroque and the works of Caravaggio, is taken up and furthered by the viewer of the artwork who reinterprets it. The works of Caravaggio derive their twofold sense as artworks from the work of art as a symbolic form and from its concrete expression as a historical style of being that conditions the Baroque and the intersubjective context of the cultural work. There is here a constant process of coming into being of the work of art and the style into the artwork that never ends. The same can be said for the other symbolic forms and for the symbolic as a whole – that is to say, for culture *tout court* and by extension *the* human.

The second thing we should note is the importance of the role of the individual. As Cassirer moves from a theory of objective spirit to a cultural anthropology, the focus turns from an analysis of the structural components and energies of objective spirit (language, art, myth, religion, science) to the agency of the individual human being in the construction and reconstruction of culture. The artwork exists at the intersection between the work of art, the work of the artist, and the individual contemplating the work of art that it opens up.

The third thing of interest is that Cassirer provides here an alternative account of the life of culture that opposes the apocalyptic fatalism of Spengler and the tragedy of culture of Simmel; an account that roots culture in an intersubjective ethical relationship with the other. For Cassirer, the cultural process of a "*manifestation* (*Äußerung*) . . . does not signify an act of alienation (*Entäußerung*) but an act of self-discovery and self-determining,"[69] of twofold self-realization, and the cultural process of objectification does not end in the death of the life of the mind. Against Spengler, Cassirer argues that the life of culture revitalizes itself in and through a *re*naissance of the creative forces that gave rise to it. We have already considered the structure of this *re*naissance and seen how Cassirer's work undertakes the revival of an enlightenment humanism as a symbolic humanism.

Cassirer also grounds the cultural process in an intersubjective relationship. Cassirer recognizes a certain estrangement in the cultural process. Like Simmel, Cassirer sees the creative energies, the effective activity, of the I objectified in the work that it produces: be it the work of art, language, science, or something else. In becoming objectified, there is a certain "distancing (*Entfernung*) from the 'I'; in a certain sense even, an estrangement (*Ent-Fremdheit*) from it; but one would be mistaken and too quick to read into this expression of 'strangeness' (*Fremdheit*) only a negative sense"[70] – as is the case in the mystical tendency of *Lebensphilosophie* – and understand it as an alienation (*Entäußerung*). The dynamic creative process never ends in an alienation, because the end of the process is not the self but the other:

> For the work, in whose enduring existence the creative process congeals, does not stand at the end of this path, but rather the "you," the other subject who receives this work in order to incorporate it into their own life and thus transform it back into the medium from which it originates.[71]

The creative process is one in which the activity of one subject is awakened in another by means of the active exchange of cultural works: "the thing created does not simply stand vis-à-vis or over against the creative process; on the contrary, new life continually pours into these 'molded forms,' preserving them and 'preventing their rigidification.'"[72] The preservation of the works of culture requires their constant renewal

through their re-creation. "The recipient does not take the gift as he would a stamped coin. For he can take it up only by using it, and in this use, he imprints upon it a new shape."[73] Each subject thus actualizes the life of culture in a unique way, and through these different ways the life of culture is transformed from within and thus revitalized. The works of culture are therefore never completely fixed once and for all; they exist only in their constant transformation in and through the intersubjective relationship that they create. And through this transformation occurs the revitalization of the spiritual force from which they first emerged and of which they constitute the objective expression. This drama of culture never becomes a complete "tragedy of culture"; for just as little as there is no ultimate victory, so too is there no ultimate defeat. Every individual modifies the universal form of which it is a particular representative. "It has rightly been emphasized that there is perhaps no individual act of speaking that has not in some way influenced 'the' language."[74] Not only do "the great historical figures of world history" possess, as Hegel and Heidegger would say, but each and every individual possesses "an active share in the construction and reconstruction of human cultural life,"[75] and as such, each has a role in the formation of world history.

(v) A Critical Theory and the Struggle Against the Technology of Myth and the Subjugation of the Individual

In *The Myth of the State*, Cassirer gives an account of the reasons for the rise of fascism as the emergence of mythical thought over rational thought. Cassirer's analysis, however, points beyond the facticity of his times to that of our own; for the decisive factor that contributed to the rise of totalitarianism was a new mode of oppression. Even when subjected to the cruelest modes of traditional political oppression, it was still possible for the individual to assume a stoic attitude toward the world and retreat into the freedom of inner life as a mode of resistance to this oppression. The technique of modern political myths, however, has destroyed this mode of resistance before it could even begin. The development of a new "technique of myth," the ability to construct political discourses is able to sublate the powers of the spontaneous force of mythical expression, imagination, and emotion and imbue them with a political purpose.

> Myth was no longer a free and spontaneous play of imagination. It was regulated and organized; it was adjusted to political needs and used for concrete political ends. What formerly appeared to be an ungovernable unconscious process was subjected to a severe discipline. It was brought under control and trained to obedience and order. Myths were brought into being by the word of command of the political leaders. They could be made at will, becoming an artificial compound manufactured in the great laboratory of politics. The twentieth century is a technical century. It invented a new technique of myth and this invention proved to be decisive in the final victory of the National Socialist party in Germany. . . . *Henceforth*, myths can be manufactured in the same sense and according to the same methods as any other modern weapon – as machine guns or airplanes. That is a new thing – and a thing of crucial importance. *It has changed the whole form of our social life*.[76]

Cassirer's analysis of this new technique of myth brings into play his entire project and perhaps more than anything else warrants our attention today. For the technique of myth did not disappear with the defeat of Nazism. Once we have understood the role and function of the word, image, the cultural hero, and ritual in the construction of our emotive being, our intuition of reality, our very perception and understanding of ourselves, others, and the world, then we have the tools to construct those discourses in such a way as to construct the reality and truths that serve a political or economic end. The technique of myth is the fabrication of words, images, and rituals that construct a certain subjectivity and reality, a certain understanding of the world, a certain life-form, that contains its own truths and alternative facts.

> The magic word takes precedence of the semantic word. . . . New words [are] coined; and even the old ones are used in a new sense; they have undergone a deep change of meaning. This change of meaning depends upon the fact that those words which formerly were used in a descriptive, logical, or semantic sense are now used as magic words that are destined to produce certain effects and to stir up certain emotions. Our ordinary words are charged with meanings; but these new-tangled words are charged with feelings and violent passions.[77]

We have no shortage of contemporary examples of this technique of myth as it is used in branding and political spin: "breaking news," the "War on Terror," but also "It's Miller time," "U.S.A.," "You deserve a break today," and "Yes we can" "make America great again."[78] In fact, it is not difficult to recognize in Cassirer's analysis of the technique of myth the blueprint for what has recently become known as the Cambridge Analytica project. Christopher Wylie (the whistleblower who revealed the nature of the project) summarizes the doctrine behind the development of the "cultural weapon to fight a cultural war" as follows:

> If you want to change politics, you first have to change culture, because politics flows from culture . . . so if you want to change culture you first have to understand what the units of culture are, people are the units of culture: so if you want to change politics, you have to change the people to change the culture.

Given the critique of culture, Cassirer's analysis shows how the new technique of myth is able to construct worldviews and configure lifestyles that serve political and economic ends; how a simulacra of the sacred is embodied in a new savior, a new hero who speaks of a people's true identity and great destiny; how individuals are enslaved through a discourse that determines their own self-understanding as part of a general common understanding of the world that is governed by a certain rationality that justifies certain actions as basic common sense; and how, in other words, individuals are "subjected" (*assujetti*), to borrow a term from Foucault, through the construction of artificial myths and above all the modern myth of the state. Here, there is no longer any true individual: there is only the mythical "identity thinking" and identity politics of "the they" (*Das Man*), to speak with Heidegger: "They act like marionettes in a puppet show – and they do not even know that the strings of this show and of man's whole individual and social life are henceforward pulled by the political leaders."[79] Subjected to the discourse of myth, the individual "no longer questions his environment; he accepts it as a matter of course."[80]

However, also given his critique of culture, Cassirer argues that this system of subjectification that exploits the emotional structures of mythical

thought and feeling can be defeated by promoting the creative critical forces of human ethical-creative freedom that tempers the fatalistic and homogenizing forces that level down the individual into an unthinking tool of political and economic hegemony.

> As long as these forces, intellectual, ethical, and artistic, are in full strength, myth is tamed and subdued. But once they begin to lose their strength, chaos comes again. Mythical thought then starts to rise anew and to pervade the whole of man's cultural and social life.[81]

Cassirer is not caught in the paradox that a resistance to discourse is but a discourse of resistance, because Cassirer does not level down all discourses to the same function.

5. CONCLUSION: ON THE WAY TO AN OPEN COSMOPOLITANISM

All too often, we speak of culture in terms of a nationalistic, ethnic, or racial identity, implicating us in some form of identity politics and ensuring a clash of civilizations as a clash of cultural identities. Perhaps not surprisingly, the idea of a "multicultural culture" would appear to be an oxymoron. In Cassirer's analysis, however, it would seem clear that there is always a plurality of worlds of understanding: there are worlds within worlds that at times clash, at times function in harmony, at times continue on oblivious to the existence of the other. Identity is not, nor has it ever been, a homogenous, stable state of being. The sense of Greek identity in antiquity clearly mutated from the ethnicity-based identity of the Athenian or the Spartan to a culturally, linguistically, and even geographically defined identity of the Helen. If we attempt to determine more locally in history what it means to be "Athenian" as opposed to "Helene," if we attempt, as Burchardt has, to provide a concept of the "Renaissance individual" in general or speak of *the* Jew, *the* Christian, *the* Muslim, or *the* Buddhist, we are quickly forced to acknowledge that no one individual answers to all the properties of this concept, and we are constantly in danger of furthering cultural stereotypes and clichés. Every cultural world is always composed of many cultural worlds that belong together, forming an identity-in-difference.

What they share is a common normative image of what it means to be human. What it means to be human is the fundamental question, and its answer forms the crystal through which life refracts and differentiates itself into the spectrum of its different manifestations opening up different worlds. The crisis in all its variations is for Cassirer a crisis in the self-understanding of the human being. The crisis is provoked by the overturning of a substantialist ontology that had operated as the ground of human understanding throughout the Western tradition. Whether the human was understood as a creature of God, as the subject of a king, or as the autonomous liberal subject: in each case, the idea of an essential nature forms the substantive content of the normative image in question. Once this assumption of an essential existence is thrown into doubt, the sense of God, king, or liberal subject appears to be little more than a historical construct whose significance is limited to a historically contingent situation and thus lacks any objective validity. Much of what passes for post-humanism or anti-humanism is a rejection of an essentialist understanding of the human, especially one that situates the human at the center of being. The philosophy of symbolic forms as a critique of culture does not and cannot attempt to answer this question. The critique of culture, rather, demonstrates how worlds and subjectivities are created, the dynamic significance of living in a world of sense and significations and why the question of the human is always a problem. For Cassirer, the human being "alone is capable of questioning," and for this reason, it is the only being that is "thoroughly problematic to itself . . . forever worthy of questioning."[82]

As a philosophical transcendental anthropology, however, the philosophy of symbolic forms indeed sets out an answer to the question, "What is the human?" The human is a symbolic animal. Cassirer's symbolic humanism does not define the human substantially as a rational being or as a liberal subject, nor does it define it existentially as the being thrown into a senseless existence, nor theologically. The human is no longer defined along the lines of a nationalistic, ethnic, racial, economic, or historical identity. Symbolic humanism is a functional and not substantial notion that realizes itself in an open and unending series of individual manifestations: the human is always to be in the process of becoming and never to be. Individuals are thrown into historical cultural situations that subjugate them as members of a community, as sons

and daughters of a *zeitgeist* and of an historical understanding of what it means to be human. The Athenian Greek world, the Christian world, and the modern world are each defined by the sense of the human that actualizes the functional symbolic humanism, understanding it in its historical situatedness. No one cultural world, however, can exhaust the infinite possibilities that are inherent in the functional notion of symbolic humanism. One may define the human as the creature of a God, as a liberal subjectivity possessing a radical autonomy, or as a *Dasein* thrown into the world.

Cassirer's central concepts are often vague and ill-defined. This is not only because they are operative within his understanding of culture and the human but also because they are operative in the construction of the human itself and as such must be open and forever in the process of being worked out through their interpretation in the construction and reconstruction of concrete-historical human existence. The critique of culture, however, also shows us that the normative image of the human that functions as the regulative idea of a cultural event always substantializes itself into an originary and essential sense of life, into a mythical substantial identity. This mythical identity is by its very nature unable to recognize other modes of the human as human, or if it does, it sees them as subhuman, primitive, or barbaric and thus as not fully human. Kant's conception of cosmopolitanism is often rejected as Eurocentric and elitist; the universal values it posits as "human" values and morals are said to be those of a privileged European male. There is no doubt that Kant's understanding of cosmopolitanism reflects the values of his world and its understanding of the human. From the perspective of a symbolic humanism, however, this ideal can be restated as an open cosmopolitanism that moves toward a point where we are able to recognize the humanity in the culturally other in such a way that it does not pose a threat to our own. But this ideal can only ever be a regulatory principle. Cassirer ends his article "The Myth of the State" in a section titled "The Antidote to Myth," by invoking the revolutionary call of Kant and reminding us of the social ethical responsibility we have to the other that gives our autonomy its sense:

> There remain only two active emotions: fortitude and generosity. They are the fundamental virtues of man; for they are those affections by

which alone he can reach the supreme goal: philosophical and ethical freedom. This freedom means not only freedom from violent desires and emotions. It means freedom from false conceptions, from inadequate ideas, from all sorts of prejudices and superstitions. . . . the *Sapere aude!* – 'Dare to think for yourself!' Fortitude is the courage to be wise, to live an independent, active, and rational life. But it is not enough that we reach this goal for ourselves. We must freely communicate the good that we have acquired for ourselves to others. And to do this we need the active passion of generosity. Fortitude and generosity are the only means to attain and secure the freedom of the individual mind and of human society. By the former we win the mastery over ourselves, by the latter we build up a social, a truly human order.[83]

ENDNOTES

1 Michael Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2000), 159.

2 In *The Space of Culture: Towards a Neo-Kantian Philosophy of Culture (Cohen, Natorp, and Cassirer)*, Sebastian Luft argues that Cassirer's own philosophy of symbolic forms as a "critique of culture" must be seen, despite its differences from the work of Cohen and Natorp, as a continuation and culmination of the project of the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism. The real thrust of Luft's work, however, is "to lay the grounds for a new occupation with culture from a transcendental-philosophical perspective," and he clearly sees Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms as the best starting point for this project. The motivations for his interest here are evident throughout his book. Luft is seeking a humanistic philosophy that is pluralistic in its conception and able to facilitate an interdisciplinary dialogue among different scientific and academic disciplines – a humanism that at once embodies and promotes the Enlightenment ideal of tolerance while providing a secure ethical position from which to critique culture. In other words, Luft sees in Cassirer's philosophy a retrieval and transformation of the unfinished project of modernity that would move us beyond the overused and worn-out concept of post-modernity. Sebastian Luft, *The Space of Culture: Towards a Neo-Kantian Philosophy of Culture (Cohen, Natorp, and Cassirer)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

3 Emmanuel Levinas, *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, in ed. J. Robbins (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 35.

4 Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2010), 364.

5 Dimitry Gawronsky, "Cassirer: His Life and His Work," in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, ed. P. A. Schilpp (Evanston, IL: The Library of Living Philosophers, 1949), 25.

6 Karl Scheffler, *Berlin: Ein Stadtschicksal* (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1910), 219.

7 Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991).

8 The most important essays from this period have been translated and published in Ernst Cassirer, *Ernst Cassirer: The Warburg Years (1919–1933): Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, trans. S. G. Lofts with A. Calcagno (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

9 Ernst Cassirer, "'Spirit' and 'Life' in Contemporary Philosophy," in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, ed. P. A. Schilpp (Evanston, IL: Library of Living Philosophers, 1949), 857–880.

10 For further details cf. translator's Introduction to Ernst Cassirer, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, trans. Steve Lofts (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

11 Cf. Ernst Cassirer, "Structuralism in Modern Linguistics," *Word: Journal of the Linguistic Circle of New York*, vol. 1 (1945), 99–120.

12 Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1946), 297.

13 Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1943), 18.

14

> An understanding of Aristotle's logic is thus conditioned by an understanding of his conception of being. . . . Thus he . . . expressly distinguishes the existence, which is indicated by mere relations in judgment, from existence after the fashion of a thing; the being of a conceptual synthesis, from that of a concrete subject. . . . The category of relation especially is forced into a dependent and subordinate position by this fundamental metaphysical doctrine of Aristotle. Relation is not independent of the concept or real being; it can only add supplementary and external modifications to the latter, such as do not affect its real 'nature.'
>
> Ernst Cassirer, *Substance and Function and Einstein's Theory of Relatiity* (Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1923), 8.

15 Ernst Cassirer, "Erkenntnistheorie nebst den Grenzfragen der Logik," *Ernst Cassirer Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9, 152ff. For the difference between "element" [*Moment*] and "element" [*Element*] see below, 30.

16 Enrst Cassirer, "The Problem of the Symbol and Its Place in the System of Philosophy," in *The Warburg Years*, 260/8.

17 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 1, lxxvii.

18 Cassirer, *Substance and Function and Einstein's Theory of Relatiity*, 447 [my emphasis].

19 In "Philosophy as Science: 'Function' and 'Energy' in Cassirer's 'Complex System' of Symbolic Forms," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 61 (December 2007), 317–377, Fabien Capeillères has set out in great detail what Cassirer understands by systematic philosophy as a rigorous science of the *globus intellectualis* that contains both the natural and human sciences, the interconnection of unity, systematicity, and scientificity that operates at the heart of the critique of culture as it seeks to establish the complex systematic ensemble of spiritual energies and finally the transition that takes place from the function relation to the symbolic function of

the symbolic form and how the function relation discussed in *Substance and Function* serves as a model for this complex systematic totality of intellectual energies.

20 Cf. Luft, *The Space of Culture*, 58–68.

21 John M. Krois, "The Priority of 'Symbolism' over Language in Cassirer's Philosophy," *Synthese*, vol. 179, no. 1, 2011, 13.

22 Ernst Cassirer, "Critical Idealism as a Philosophy of Culture," in *Cassirer, Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer: 1935–1945*, ed. Donald Verne (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1979, 80 f.

23 Ernst Cassirer, "Erkenntnistheorie nebst den Grenzfragen der Logik und Denkpsychologie," *Ernst Cassirer Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 17, 16.

24 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, 205.

25 Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, 26.

26 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, lxxviii.

27 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 1, 244–245.

28 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 1, 15.

29 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, 205.

30 Ernst Cassirer, "Structuralism in Modern Linguistics," *Word: Journal of the Linguistic Circle of New York*, vol. 1 (1945), 118 (*Ernst Cassirer Gesammelte Werke*, 24, 318).

31 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, 236.

32 Cassirer, *Substance and Function and Einstein's Theory of Relatiity*, 310-311.

33 Ernst Cassirer, "The Problem of the Symbol and Its Place in the System of Philosophy," in *The Warburg Years (1919–1933): Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, trans. S. G. Lofts with A. Calcagno (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 260.

34 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 1, 29.

35 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, 236.

36 Rudolf Bernet, "Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy," in *Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Sebastian Luft (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 48.

37 To what degree Cassirer's thought remains neo-Kantian is a subject of debate within Cassirer scholarship, and no attempt has been made to clarify this issue here.

38 Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 222-223.

39 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, 44.

40 Ernst Cassirer, "'Life' and 'Spirit'," in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, 578.

41 Ibid., 569.

42 Cassirer, *The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms*, trans. John Michael Krois (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 9 (*Ernst Cassirer Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte*, vol. 1, 10).

43 Ibid., 9 (*Ernst Cassirer Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte*, vol. 1, 10).

44 Ibid., 10 (*Ernst Cassirer Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte*, vol. 1, 11).

45 Ibid., 15 (*Ernst Cassirer Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte*, vol. 1, 16).

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., 19 (*Ernst Cassirer Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte*, vol. 1, 18).
48 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, 90.
49 John Michael Krois, "Cassirer, Neo-Kantianism, and Metaphysics," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 97e Année, no. 4, Cassirer (Octobre-Décembre 1992), 441 and 444.
50 Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 293.
51 Ibid., 286.
52 Ernst Cassirer, "The Concept of Philosophy as a Philosophical Problem," in *Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer, 1935–1945*, ed. Donald Verene (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 60.
53 Ibid., 60–61.
54 Ernst Cassirer, "Form and Technology," in *The Warburg Years* (1919–1933 – Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology, trans. S. G. Lofts with A. Calcagno (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 272.
55 Ibid., 315.
56 Cassirer, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, 112.
57 Ernst Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 84.
58 Ernst Cassirer, *The Case of Jacques Rousseau* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 115.
59 Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 183.
60 Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, 150.
61 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, xi.
62 Cassirer, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, 63.
63 Ibid., 26.
64 Ibid., 58.
65 Ibid., 70.
66 Ibid., 72.
67 Ibid.
68 Comte de Buffon, *Discours sur le style*, 1753.
69 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, 43.
70 Cassirer, *The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms*, 141 (*Ernst Cassirer Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte*, vol. 1, 137): translation amended. Cassirer ends the sentence here by referring to mysticism. However, in *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, he equates the position of *Lebensphilosophie*, which seeks to do away with all symbolic expression, with that of the mystic.
71 Cassirer, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, 110.
72 Ibid., 113.
73 Ibid., 104.
74 Ibid., 127.
75 Cassirer, *Myth of the State*, 293.
76 Ibid., 235 f.
77 Ibid., 283.

78 Noam Chomsky provides us with an example. The 1938 invasions of Czechoslovakia and Poland were framed as "defending Germany, and civilized values, against the terror of the Czechs and Poles and carrying out 'defensive actions against the Jewish world-criminals." The expression coined for this defense of Germany and civilization was "*Terror gegen Terror*" (terror against terror).

79 Albert Speer writes in his autobiography, *Inside the Third Reich*:

> Only a few months before I had been carried away by the prospect of drafting and executing buildings. Now I was completely under Hitler's spell, unreservedly and unthinkingly held by him. I was ready to follow him anywhere. . . . Years later, in Spandau, I read Ernst Cassirer's comment on the men who of their own accord threw away man's highest privilege: to be an autonomous person. Now I was one of them.
>
> Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2015), 49.

80 Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 286.

81 Cassirer, "The Myth of the State," *Ernst Cassirer Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 24, 298.

82 Cassirer, "'Life' and 'Spirit,'" *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, 579.

83 Cassirer, "The Myth of the State," *Ernst Cassirer Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 24, 265.

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Preface

The first draft of this work, whose first volume I am here submitting, goes back to the investigations that are summed up in my book *Substance and Function* (Berlin, 1910). When I attempted to apply my findings of these investigations, which focused essentially on the structure of mathematical and natural-scientific thinking, to the problems that concerned the *human sciences* [*Geisteswissenschaften*], it became increasingly clear to me that the general theory of cognition [*Erkenntnistheorie*], in its traditional approach and limitations, was not sufficient to provide an adequate methodological foundation for the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*]. If such a foundation were to be acquired, then the plan for this theory of cognition [*Erkenntnistheorie*] would need to be fundamentally broadened. Rather than investigating only the general presuppositions of the scientific *cognizing* of the world, it was equally necessary to differentiate the different basic forms of "*understanding*" [*Verstehen*] of the world and apprehend each one of them as sharply as possible in their distinctive tendency and spiritual form. Only when such a "morphology" [*Formenlehre*] of spirit had been established, at least in general outline, could we hope to ground a clearer methodological view and a more secure principle of grounding for the individual disciplines of the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*]. It seemed to me that the theory of the formation of concepts and judgments of the natural sciences, by which the "object"

[*Objekt*] of nature is determined in its fundamental constitutive features and by which the "object" [*Gegenstand*] of cognition is apprehended in its conditionality through the function of cognition, must be amplified by an analogous determination for the domain of pure subjectivity. This subjectivity does not solely consist in the cognitive contemplation of nature and reality but also proves itself to be effective everywhere where the whole of the appearance is posited and configured from a specific spiritual perspective. It must be shown how each of these configurations fulfills its own task in the construction of spirit and how each stands under a particular law. The plan for a general theory of the spiritual forms of expression, which is expounded more fully in my introduction, developed out of my pursuit of this problem. As for the detailed arrange-
viii ment of this study, this first part is limited to an analysis of the linguistic form; a second volume which, I hope, will appear in approximately one year, is designated to embody the framework for a phenomenology of mythical and religious thinking; and the third and last volume will arrive at the presentation of a proper "theory of cognition [*Erkenntnistheorie*]," i.e., the morphology [*Formenlehre*] of *scientific* thinking.

A consideration of language according to its purely philosophical content [*Gehalt*] and from the standpoint of a certain philosophical "system" is a risk that has already been undertaken in Wilhelm von Humboldt's seminal works. If Humboldt, as he wrote to Wolf in 1805, believed that he had uncovered the art of how to use language as a vehicle to work us through the deepest and highest manifold of the whole world, then it seems that the direction that has been taken by linguistics and the philosophy of language in the nineteenth century has progressively pushed back such an aspiration. At times, language seemed to become the proper and strongest instrument of philosophical skepticism rather than a vehicle of philosophical cognition. However, even if we disregard the conclusions of the modern critique of language, which for the philosophy of language become synonymous with the disavowal and denouement of its spiritual content [*Gehalt*], we find an increasing conviction that a philosophical foundation of language, if possible at all, would have to be achieved by means of *psychological* research. The ideal of an absolutely universal, "philosophical" grammar, which the empiricists and rationalists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had pursued in different ways, seemed to have been destroyed with the foundation

of scientific comparative linguistics: the unity of language could no longer be sought in its logical content [*Gehalt*], but only in its emergence and in the psychological laws of this emergence. Wundt's great work on language, in which for a long time he attempted to subject the totality of linguistic phenomena to a certain intellectual [*geistig*] interpretation, derives the principle of this interpretation from the concept and methodology of ethnopsychology. Along the same lines of thought, Steinthal had, in his *Introduction to the Psychology and Linguistic Science* (1871), attempted to prove Herbart's concept of apperception to be the foundation for the consideration of language. Subsequently, Marty (1908), in conscious and sharp opposition to the foundation of Steinthal's and Wundt's view of language, returned to the idea of a "general grammar and philosophy of language,"[1] which he regarded as the framework for a "descriptive theory of signification."[2] However, he too attempted to accomplish the construction of this theory of signification by purely psychological means; indeed, he explicitly limited the task of the philosophy of language so that all the general and legitimate problems directed at the linguistic phenomena belong to it insofar as they were "either of a psychological nature or at very least could not be solved without having recourse primarily to psychology."[3] Thus, it appeared that in this domain – despite the opposition encountered to this outlook in the sphere of linguistic research itself, above all by Karl Vossler – psychologism and positivism not only seemed to be established as a methodological ideal but also seemed to be raised to a universal dogma. Philosophical idealism has certainly not ceased to fight against this dogma; it has, however, also not recaptured the *autonomous* position that language possessed with Wilhelm von Humboldt. For, instead of understanding it as an independent spiritual "form" based on a distinctive law, it had attempted to trace it back to the general aesthetic function of expression. In this sense, Benedetto Croce had classified and subordinated the problem of linguistic expression to the problem of aesthetic expression, while Hermann Cohen's philosophical system treated logic, ethics, aesthetics, and finally the philosophy of religion as independent members but only occasionally touched on the fundamental question of language and this in connection with the fundamental question of aesthetics.

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Given this state of affairs, the present exposition could not move, philosophically speaking, within an already delimited sphere of thought

but instead had to attempt to forge its own methodological path. The development of *linguistic science* that has taken place since the days of Wilhelm von Humboldt, however, has provided richer resources for the implementation of its theme. If the idea of a truly universal view of language still appears in Humboldt to be a postulate of philosophical idealism, then this postulate would seem to have progressively
x approached its concrete-scientific fulfillment. Of course, this wealth of material or empirical-scientific research places philosophical contemplation before an insuperable difficulty. For it can no more disregard these details than it can wholly submit to them and still remain entirely faithful to its own intention and task. This methodological dilemma left no other choice than to formulate the *questions* that were addressed in linguistics with systematic generality, but in each case to extract the *answers* to these questions from the empirical research itself. It had to attempt to secure the broadest possible overview, not only of the phenomena of a single linguistic sphere but also of various linguistic spheres that differed in structure and were widely divergent from each other in their basic mode of thinking. The scope of the literature in linguistic sciences that had to be consulted in the working out of these problems became so vast that the goal initially set out for this investigation receded further and further into the distance, so that I asked myself whether this goal was at all attainable for me. If I have, nevertheless, continued along this trodden path, it is because the more the manifold of linguistic phenomena opened up before me, the clearer I believed to perceive the individual details that mutually illuminate each other and how, as it were, they inserted themselves into a general interconnection. The following investigations are directed at the consideration of the development and elucidation of this interconnection and not with any isolated instances. If the basic epistemo-critical idea by which they are oriented is established – if the presentation and characterization of the pure *form* of language, as it is attempted here, proves sound – then many individual details that I have overlooked or missed will easily be supplied or rectified in a future reworking of the subject. In working on this book, I have become keenly aware of the difficulty of the subject matter and the limits of my own powers, not to welcome the criticism of experts in the field. To facilitate this criticism, I have, in interpreting and employing the detailed material from the linguistic sciences, always expressly indicated my authorities and sources so as to make immediate verification possible.

It remains for me only to express my thanks to all those who have helped me in the working out of this book, either by the general interest that they have taken in it or by their expert advice. In my attempt to gain a more accurate insight into the structure of the so-called primitive languages, I have been guided from the beginning by the works of Carl Meinhof and by those of Boas and Seler on the Native American languages. After my call to Hamburg in 1919, I had at my disposal not only the rich library of the seminar led by Meinhof on African and South Sea languages but was also allowed to avail myself of Professor Meinhof's cordially proffered and extremely helpful advice on many of the most difficult cases. I also owe thanks to my colleagues Professor Otto Dempwolff and Professor Heinrich Junker for insights gained through conversations with them. Finally, Ernst Hoffmann in Heidelberg and Emil Wolff in Hamburg assisted me far beyond simple encouragement. Above all, these two men, themselves situated in the midst of philological and the sciences of language, share with me the fundamental view on which this book rests: the conviction that language, like all basic spiritual functions, can be elucidated by philosophy only within a complete system of philosophical *idealism*. I also owe heartfelt thanks to Ernst Hoffmann for reading the proofs of this first volume despite the heavy pressure of his own work. Unfortunately, certain important references and additions that he offered me in the process could not, for technical reasons, be included in the published book, but I hope to make use of them in a future treatment of the subject.

Hamburg, April 1923
Ernst Cassirer

ENDNOTES

1 Antonn Marty, *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der allgemeine Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie*, I (Hall: Niemeyer, 1908).
2 Ibid., 53.
3 Ibid., 19.

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INTRODUCTION AND THE FRAMING OF THE PROBLEM

1. THE CONCEPT OF SYMBOLIC FORM AND THE SYSTEMATIZATION OF THE SYMBOLIC FORMS

The initial starting point of philosophical speculation was marked by the concept of *being* [*Sein*]. In the moment that this concept was constituted as such, in the moment that the consciousness of the unity of being [*Sein*] as opposed to the multiplicity and diversity of beings [*Seiende*] was awakened, the specifically philosophical tendency of contemplating the world arose. This view remained, however, bound for a long time to the ambit of beings, which it strove to leave and overcome. The beginning and origin, the ultimate "ground" of all being [*Sein*] should be expressed [*ausgesprochen*]; however, as clearly as this question was posed, the concrete, determinate answers given were not adequate to this supreme universal formulation of the problem. What was designated as the nature [*Wesen*], as the substance of the world, did not, in principle, reach beyond the world but rather was only an extract from the world itself. An individual, particular, and limited being [*Seiende*] was picked out, and everything else was generically derived from it and "explained by it." Thus, as varied as the contents of this explanation may have been configured, its general *form* nevertheless remained within the same methodological boundaries. At first, it was still an individual-sensible existence, a concrete "primal matter" that was set up as the ultimate ground of the totality

[*Gesamtheit*] of appearances; then the explanation became more ideal, and there emerged, in place of this matter, a purely intellectual "principle" of deduction and grounding. Upon closer consideration, however, this "principle" hung in midair between the "physical" and "spiritual." Despite its bearing the color of the ideal, it remained closely imprisoned in the world of existents. In this sense, the number of the Pythagoreans, the atom of Democritus, though far removed from the primal matter of the Ionians, remained a methodological hybrid that had not found its proper nature and had not, as it were, chosen its true spiritual home. This inner uncertainty is finally overcome only in Plato's theory of Ideas.
2 The great systematic and historical achievement of this theory consists in the fact that here, for the first time, the basic and essential spiritual presupposition for all philosophical comprehension and every philosophical explanation of the world emerged in an explicit shape. What Plato sought under the name of "Idea" had been effective as an immanent principle in the earliest attempts at explanation, in the philosophers of Elea, in the Pythagoreans, in Democritus; Plato was, however, the first to be aware of what this principle was and what it signified. Plato understood his philosophical achievement in this way. In his late works, in which he raises the logical presuppositions of his theory to its greatest clarity, he characterizes the crucial difference that separates his speculation from that of the Pre-Socratics: whereas with the Pre-Socratics, being [*Sein*], in the form of an individual being [*Seiende*], was taken as a fixed *starting point*, with Plato, being was for the first time recognized as a *problem*. He no longer simply inquired into the organization, into the constitution and *structure* of being, but rather inquired into the *concept* of being and the significance of this concept. Against this sharp question and its strict demand, all earlier attempts at explanation faded into fables or myths about being.[1] It was time to abandon this mythical-cosmological explanation for the truly dialectical explanation that no longer adhered to its mere *consistent existence* [*Bestand*] but made visible its intelligible *sense*, its systematic-teleological construction [*Fügung*]. And with this, thinking, which in Greek philosophy since Parmenides had appeared as a concept interchangeable with that of being, acquires a new and more profound significance. Only when being receives the sharply determinate sense of a *problem* does thinking receive the sharply determinate sense and value of a *principle*. Thinking no longer runs parallel to being, a mere reflection "about" being, but by its own inner form, it now determines the inner form of being.

The same typical basic feature is repeated at different stages in the historical development of idealism. Where a realistic view of the world was content with some ultimate constitution of things as the foundation for all cognizing, idealism turned this very same attribute into a question for thinking. This process is discernible not only in the history of philosophy but in the individual sciences as well. Here too, the way does not lead solely from "facts" back to "laws" and from "laws" back to "axioms" and "basic principles"; rather, these axioms and basic principles, which at a certain stage of cognition stand there as the latest and most complete expression of the solution, must once again, at a later stage, become a problem. Accordingly, what science designates as its "being" and its "object" ceases to appear as a simple and indivisible consistent fact; rather, every new manner and direction of contemplation discloses in it a new element. With it, the rigid concept of being appears, so to speak, to dissolve into flux, into a general movement – and it is possible to think the unity of being in general only as the goal and no longer as the beginning of this movement. To the degree that this insight unfolded and infiltrated science itself, the naïve *picture theory* [*Abbildtheorie*] of cognition is deprived of its soil. The basic concepts of every science, the means with which it poses its questions and formulates its solution, no longer appear to be passive *pictures* [*Abbilder*] of a given being but self-created intellectual *symbols*. It was, in particular, physicomathematical cognition that was the first to clearly become aware of this symbolic character of its basic means.[2] In the preliminary considerations with which he introduces his *Principles of Mechanics*, Heinrich Hertz has brought the new ideal of cognition, to which this entire development points, to its most pregnant expression. He designates it as the closest and most important task of our cognition of nature that enables us to anticipate future experiences; however, the procedure, which serves to derive the future from the past, consists in the fact that we make for ourselves "inner simulacra or symbols" of external objects, which are of such a nature that the necessary consequents in the thought of images [*Bilder*] are always the images of the necessary consequences in the nature of the objects pictured [*abgebildet*].

> When from our accumulated previous experience, we have finally succeeded in deducing images of the desired constitution, we can then in a short time develop by means of them, as by means of models, the

> consequences which in the outer world only arise in a comparatively long time, or as the result of our own intervening. . . . The images [*Bilder*], of which we speak, are our representations of things; they have *one* essential
> 4 correspondence with the things themselves, namely the fulfillment of the above-mentioned demand; however, it is not necessary for their purpose that they have some further correspondence with things. As a matter of fact, we do not know, nor have any means of experiencing, whether our representations of things are in agreement with them in any other way than in this *one* fundamental relation.[3]

Thus, we have here the natural-scientific theory of cognition [*Erkenntnistheorie*] that stems from Heinrich Hertz – the theory of "signs," as it was first thoroughly developed by Helmholtz, continued to speak the *language* of the picture theory [*Abbildtheorie*] of cognition – however, the concept of the "image" has now in itself undergone an inner transformation. For in place of the vague requirement for a *similarity* of content between the image and the thing [*Sache*], we now find expressed a highly complex logical expressive relationship, a general intellectual *condition* that the basic concepts of physical cognition must satisfy. Its value lies not in the reflection of a given existence but in what it accomplishes as a means of cognition, in a unity of appearances, which the appearances must produce out of themselves. A system of physical concepts should be able to survey the interconnection of objective objects and the manner of their mutual dependency, but this survey is possible only insofar as these concepts already pertain from the beginning to a determinate, uniform line of sight of cognition. The object cannot be regarded as some naked in-itself [*Ansich*], independently of the essential categories of the cognition of nature; rather, only within these categories, which first constitute its proper form, can it be brought to presentation. In this sense, the basic concepts of mechanics, particularly the concepts of mass and force, were for Hertz "simulacra" which, since they are created by the logic of the cognition of nature, were subjected to the general demands of this logic, among which the *a priori* demand for clarity, freedom from contradiction, and unambiguousness of account takes first place.

It is true that with this critical insight, science has to give up the hope and aspiration to an "immediate" apprehension and rendering of the actual. It understands that all objectivization, of which it is capable, is in

truth a mediation and must remain a mediation. In this insight, there is 5
found a further and momentous consequence of idealism. If the definition and determination of the object of cognition can be made only ever through the medium of a conceptual structure with a distinctive logic, then the conclusion cannot be denied that a diversity of these media will correspond to a diversity of the construction [*Fügung*] of the object, to a different sense of "objective" interconnections. Even within the ambit of "nature," the physical object will not coincide absolutely with the chemical object, nor the chemical with the biological – for physical, chemical, biological cognition each *frame the question* from their own particular standpoint and, in accordance with this standpoint, subject the appearances to a specific interpretation and forming [*Formung*]. It almost appears as if through this result the development of idealistic thought thwarted once and for all the expectation with which it had begun. The end of this development seems to negate its beginning – for the unity of being that was desired and demanded now threatens once more to disintegrate into a mere manifold of beings. The one being, to which *thinking* holds fast and from which it seems unable to relinquish without destroying its own form, withdraws more and more from the domain of *cognition*. The more its metaphysical unity as a "thing in itself" is asserted, the more it evades all possibility of cognizing, until at last it is relegated entirely to the domain of the uncognizable and becomes a mere X. This rigid metaphysical *absolutum*, however, now stands over against the realm of appearances as the proper domain of the knowable and recognizable in all its unrealizable multiplicity, in its conditionality and relativity. Upon closer scrutiny, however, in this irreducible diversity of the methods and objects of knowledge, the basic demand of unity is not rejected by this as such, but rather, it is posited here in a new form. The unity of knowledge can now, of course, no longer be guaranteed and secured in that it is based in all its forms on a common "simple" object that is related to all of these forms as the transcendent archetype [*Urbild*] to the empirical pictures [*Abbilder*]. However, rather than this, the other demand is now given: to apprehend in one *system* the diverse methodological directions of knowledge in all their recognized particular nature and autonomy, such that the individual members, precisely through their necessary diversity, will complement and require one another. The postulate of a 6
purely functional unity replaces the postulate of the unity of a substrate

and the unity of an origin that essentially dominated the ancient concept of being. Out of this, a new task is set forth for the philosophical critique of cognition. It must follow and survey as a whole the path taken by the individual trends of the particular sciences. It must pose the question whether the intellectual symbols, by means of which the particular disciplines consider and describe reality, are to be thought of as a simple juxtaposition or whether they are to be understood as different manifestations of one and the same basic spiritual function. And if the latter presupposition should prove itself, then a further task appears: to establish the general conditions of this function and to explain the principle governing it. Instead of inquiring with dogmatic metaphysics into the absolute unity of substance to which every particular existence must be reduced, it would now inquire into a rule that governs the concrete manifold and the diversity of the functions of cognition and, without sublating and destroying them, combine them into a unified doing, a self-contained intellectual action.

Once again, however, this point of view widens as soon as one considers that *cognition*, however universally and comprehensively its concept may be taken, only ever exhibits one of the modes of form-bestowing present in the whole of the spiritual apprehension and interpretation of being. A configuration of the manifold is led by a specific but therefore at the same time clearly and sharply delimited principle. All cognition, however different it may be in its ways and orientation, aims ultimately to subject the multiplicity of appearances to the unity of a "principle of sufficient reason." The individual *as* individual must not be left to stand alone; rather, the individual must join an interconnection in which it appears as a member [*Glied*] of a "framework" [*Gefüge*], be it logical, teleological, or causal. Cognition remains essentially directed toward this essential aim, toward the incorporation [*Einfügung*] of the particular into a universal form of law and order. However, beside this form of intellectual synthesis, which exhibits and operates within a system of scientific concepts, the whole of spiritual life knows other modes of configuration. They, too, can be designated as certain modes of "objectivization" – i.e., as means of raising an individual to the generally valid; however, they achieve this goal of general validity in a completely different way
7 from that of the logical concept and the logical law. Every genuine, basic spiritual function has one decisive feature in common with cognition:

it is inherent in an original-formative force and not merely an imitative force. It does not express passively the mere fact that something is present [*Vorhanden*] but rather contains an independent energy of spirit through which the simple existence of the appearance assumes a determinate "signification," a distinctive ideational content [*Gehalt*]. This is as valid for art as it is for cognition; it is as valid for myth as for religion. They all live in distinctive image-worlds, which do not simply reflect the empirically given but which rather produce it in accordance with an independent principle. And thus, each of them creates its own symbolic configurations, which if not of the same kind as the intellectual symbols are, nevertheless, equal as to their spiritual origin. None of these configurations can simply be reduced to, or derived from, the others; rather, each of them designates a determinate mode of spiritual apprehension, in and through which it constitutes its own aspect of the "actual." They are not different modes in which some actual reveals itself to spirit but rather paths by which spirit proceeds in its objectivization – i.e., its self-revelation. If we grasp art and language, myth and cognition, in *this* sense, then a common problem immediately emerges that opens up a new approach to a general philosophy of the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*].

The "revolution in the way of thinking"[4] that Kant undertook within theoretical philosophy was based on the basic idea that the relationship between cognition and its object, which has generally been assumed, required a radical inversion. Instead of starting out from the object as the known [*Bekannten*] and given, it was, rather, necessary to begin with the laws of cognition as what alone, in a primary sense, is truly accessible and certain; instead of determining the most general properties of *being*, in the sense of ontological metaphysics, we must, through an analysis of reason, ascertain the basic forms of *judgment* as the condition under which objectivity alone is *positable* [*setzbar*], ascertained, and determined in its manifold branches. According to Kant, only this analysis can disclose the conditions on which all *knowledge* [*Wissen*] of being and the pure concept of being depend. However, as the correlate of the synthetic unity of the understanding itself, the object, which the transcendental analytics situates before us in this way, is a pure logically determined object. As a result, it does not designate all objectivity as such, but only that form of objective lawfulness that can be grasped and exhibited by the

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basic concepts of science, particularly the concepts and basic principles of mathematical physics. Thus, as soon as Kant progresses, in the totality of the three critiques, to develop the true "system of pure reason," he already proves that this form of objectivity is too narrow. The mathematical natural-scientific being, in its idealistic version and interpretation, does not exhaust all reality, because it is by no means concerned with all the effectiveness and spontaneity of spirit. In the intelligible realm of freedom, whose basic law is developed by the critique of practical reason, in the realm of art and the realm of organic natural forms, as exhibited in the critique of aesthetics and teleological judgment, a new aspect of this reality emerges. This *gradual* unfolding of the critical-idealistic concept of reality and the critical-idealistic concept of spirit belongs to the most distinctive features of Kantian thinking and is grounded in a kind of stylistic law of this thinking. The proper, concrete totality of spirit is not designated in a simple formula and given, as it were, ready-made from the beginning; rather, it develops and finds itself only in the continuous advancing progress of critical analysis. The ambit of spiritual being can be designated and determined only as a result of being pursued in this process. It lies in the nature of this process not only that its beginning and end are broken asunder but also that they must apparently conflict with each other; however, the conflict is none other than that between potency and act, between the mere logical "predisposition" of a concept and its complete development and impact. From the standpoint of the latter, the Copernican revolution, with which Kant began, takes on a new and wider sense. It no longer refers only to the logical function of judgment but extends, with equal justification and right, to every tendency and every principle of spiritual configuration. The crucial question always remains whether we seek to understand the function by the formation [*Gebilde*] or the formation [*Gebilde*] by the function, which we choose to "ground" the other. This question forms the spiritual bond that connects the most diverse problem domains with one another; it constitutes their inner methodological unity, without
9 ever letting them lapse into a factual one-and-the-sameness [*sachliche Einerleiheit*]. For the basic principle of critical thinking, the principle of the "primacy" of the function over the object, assumes in each special domain a new shape [*Gestalt*] and demands a new and dependent grounding. Alongside the pure function of cognition, there stands the

function of linguistic thinking, the function of mythical-religious thinking, and the function of artistic intuition, comprehended in such a way as that it is evident how in all of them a specific configuration, not so much *of* [*der*] the world as rather *toward* [*zu*] the world, toward an objective interconnection of sense and an objective-intuitive whole that can be apprehended as such takes place.

With this, the critique of reason becomes a critique of culture. It seeks to understand and demonstrate how the content of culture, insofar as it is more than a merely individual content, insofar as it is grounded in a general principle of form, presupposes an original act of spirit. Herein the basic thesis of idealism finds its true and complete confirmation. As long as philosophical contemplation takes up the analysis of the pure *form of cognition* and limits itself to this task, the force of the naïve-realistic view of the world cannot be completely discredited. The object of cognition may in some way be after all determined and formed in and through cognition and its original law; however, beyond this relation [*Relation*], it must, nevertheless, also appear to be present and given as something independent of the basic categories of cognition. If, however, we begin not with the general concept of the world but rather from the general concept of culture, then the question immediately assumes a different shape. For the content of the concept of culture cannot be detached from the basic forms and tendencies of spiritual productivity: "being" is graspable here nowhere else than in "activity" [*Tun*]. Only insofar as there is a specific tendency of aesthetic fantasy and intuition is there a domain of aesthetic objects, and the same is valid for all of those other spiritual energies by virtue of which the form and outline of a specific domain of objects takes shape [*sich gestaltet*] for us. Even religious consciousness, convinced as it is of the "reality" [*Realität*], the truth, of its object, transforms this reality into the lowest level, to the level of purely mythological thinking, into a simple tangible *existence* [*Existenz*]. At higher levels of contemplation, it is more or less clearly aware that it "has" its object only in that it relates to it in an absolutely distinctive way. The ultimate guarantee of this very objectivity is contained in a type of self-comportment [*Sich-Verhalten*], in the tendency that spirit gives to an intended objective [*ein gedachtes Objektive*]. Philosophical thinking confronts all of these tendencies – not just with the intention to pursue each one of them separately or to survey them as a whole but also with the presupposition that it must

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be possible to refer them to a uniform focal point, to an ideal center. When regarded critically, however, this center can never be located in a given being [*Sein*], but only in a common *task*. Thus, with all their inner diversity, the different products of spiritual culture – language, scientific cognition, myth, art, and religion – become members of one large problem nexus: they become manifold approaches, all of which are oriented toward one goal: to transform the passive world of mere *impressions*, in which spirit at first seems imprisoned, into a world of pure spiritual *expression*.

For just as the modern philosophy of language had established the concept of the inner form of language to secure the proper starting point for a philosophical consideration of language, so too it can be said that an analogous "inner form" of religion, myth, art, and scientific cognition is to be presupposed and sought. And this form would signify not simply the sum or subsequent combination [*Zusammenfassung*] of the individual appearances of these domains but also the conditioning law of their construction. Of course, in the end, there is no other way to assure ourselves of these laws than to demonstrate them in the appearances and "abstract" them from these appearances; however, at the same time, this very abstraction shows the laws to be a necessary and constitutive moment of the consistent content of the individuals. In the course of its history, philosophy has remained more or less cognizant of the task of such an analysis and critique of the particular cultural forms; however, in most cases, it has taken up only *part* of this task and addressed it, to be sure, more in its negative than in its positive intention. The endeavor that went into this critique was often less about the presentation and grounding of the positive achievements of each individual form than it was about the defense of wrong claims. Since the days of the Greek Sophists, there has been a skeptical critique of language and a skeptical critique of myths and cognition. This essentially negative attitude becomes understandable if we consider that in fact every basic form of spirit, in that it appears and develops, is a unique endeavor to give itself not just in part but as a whole
11 and consequently to claim for itself not a merely relative validity but rather an absolute validity. Not contenting itself with its special precinct, it seeks, rather, to imprint the distinctive stamp, with which it conducts itself, on the whole of being and spiritual life. The conflicts

of culture and the antinomies of the concept of culture ensue from this striving for the unconditioned, which is inherent in every single tendency. *Science* originates in a form of contemplation that, before it could get going and assert itself, was everywhere compelled to establish those first combinations and separations of thinking that had found their earliest expression and sedimentation in *language* and in general linguistic concepts. However, in that it makes use of language as material and as a foundation, science at the same time necessarily proceeded beyond language. A new "logos," which is guided and governed by a principle other than that of linguistic thinking, now emerges and forms itself ever-more clearly and independently. And measured by it, the formations of language now appear as restraints and limits that must gradually be overcome by the force and particular nature of the new principle. The critique of language and the linguistic thought-form becomes an integrated component of the advancement of scientific and philosophical thinking. And this typical course of development is repeated in the other domains. The individual-spiritual tendencies do not move peacefully side by side, seeking to complement one another; rather, each becomes what it is only by demonstrating its own peculiar force against the others and in a struggle with them. Religion and art are so close to one another in their purely historical-effective action, and so informed by one another, that sometimes the two seem indistinguishable in their content [*Gehalt*] and in their inner principle of forming. It has been said that the gods of Greece owed their origin to Homer and Hesiod. And yet, on the other hand, as the religious thinking of the Greeks progressed, it separated more and more from its aesthetic beginnings and originary-ground. After Xenophanes, it rebelled more and more resolutely against the mythical-poetic and the sensible-plastic concepts of the gods, which it recognized and rejected as anthropomorphic. In such spiritual struggles and conflicts – as they constituted themselves throughout history in ever-new and ever-greater potentiation [*Potenzierung*] and intensification – the ultimate arbitration appears to be expected from philosophy alone, as the highest instance of unity. However, the dogmatic systems of metaphysics only imperfectly satisfied this expectation and demand. For in most cases, they stood amid the battle that was taking place and not above it: despite the conceptual universality toward which

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they strove, they represented only *one* side of the opposition instead of apprehending and mediating the conflict in its whole breadth and depth. For most of them are nothing other than metaphysical hypostases of a determinate logical, aesthetic, or religious principle. The more they imprisoned themselves in the abstract universality of this principle, the more they closed themselves off from individual aspects of spiritual culture and from the concrete totality [*Totalität*] of their forms. Philosophical reflection will be able to avoid the danger of this conclusion only if it is able to find a standpoint situated *above* all of these forms and yet not located as such beyond them – a standpoint that would seek to make it possible to encompass the whole of them in one glance and that would seek to render visible in this one glance nothing less than the pure immanent relationship that all of these forms have to each other and not the relationship that they have to an external, "transcendent" being or principle. We would, then, have a philosophical systematization of spirit in which each particular form would obtain its sense purely from the *position* in which it stands, a systematization in which its content [*Gehalt*] and its significance would be designated by the wealth and particular nature of the relations and entanglements in which they relate to other spiritual energies and ultimately to allness [*Allheit*].

From the beginnings of modern philosophy and since the foundation of modern philosophical idealism, there has been no lack of attempts and promising steps toward the establishment of such a systematization. To be sure, although Descartes' methodological manifesto *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* [*Rules for the Direction of the Mind*] already indicated that the attempt of the old metaphysics to survey the totality [*Gesamtheit*] of *things* and to penetrate the ultimate mysteries of *nature* was fruitless, it insisted all the more emphatically that it must be possible to exhaustively measure the *universitas* of *spirit* in thought; "*ingenii limites definire*," to define the whole domain and limits of spirit: this maxim of Descartes has become the watchword of all modern philosophy. The concept of spirit is, however, still conflicted and ambiguous; for it is used sometimes in a narrow sense, sometimes in a much wider sense. The philosophy of Descartes begins from a new, comprehensive concept of *consciousness* but then, with
13 the term *cogitatio*, allows this concept to coincide once again with pure *thinking* – thus, for Descartes, and for all rationalism, the systematization

of spirit coincides with thinking. The *universitas* of spirit, its concrete totality [*Totalität*], shall therefore be deemed to be truly apprehended and philosophically penetrated only if it is possible to deduce it from a single *logical* principle. Thus, the pure form of logic is once again erected as the prototype and model for all spiritual being [*Sein*] and every spiritual form. And just as with Descartes, with whom the series of the systems of classical idealism began, so likewise with Hegel, with whom this series concluded, this methodic interconnection stands before us once again in full clarity. More sharply than any thinker before him, Hegel set out the demand to think the whole of spirit as a *concrete* whole and, thus, not to stop with its simple concept but rather to develop it into the totality [*Gesamtheit*] of its manifestations [*Äußerungen*]. And yet the phenomenology of spirit, which strove to fulfill this demand, prepared only the terrain for *logic* and the way to it. The manifold of spiritual forms, as they are set up in the phenomenology, finally culminate in a highest logical summit, and it is only in this endpoint that they attain their consummate "truth" and essential being. As rich and varied as they are in their content, their structure is subordinated to a single and, in a certain sense, uniform law – the law of dialectical method that constitutes the steady rhythm of the self-movement of the concept. Spirit concludes all the movements of its shapes in absolute knowledge, in which it acquires the pure element [*Element*] of its existence: the concept. All the earlier stages that it has passed through are, to be sure, contained as elements [*Momente*] but also sublated into mere moments [*Momente*]. Thus, of all the spiritual forms, only that of the form of the logical, the form of the concept and of cognition, appears to have been ascribed a real, true *autonomy*. The concept is not only a means *to present* the concrete life of spirit but also the true substantial element [*Element*] of spirit itself. Accordingly, however much all spiritual being [*Sein*] and events [*Geschehen*] is apprehended in its specific particularization [*Besonderung*] and should be recognized in this particularization, it is, in the end, reduced to and based on a single dimension – and only in this relation is its most profound content [*Gehalt*] and its real significance initially apprehended.

And in fact, this ultimate centralization of all of the spiritual forms in the *one* logical form seems to be necessarily demanded by the concept of philosophy and in particular by the basic principle of philosophical idealism. For if we renounced this unity, then, in general, there would 14

appear to be no way to speak about a rigorous *systematization* of these forms. Thus, only a purely empirical procedure remains as the counter-image [*Gegenbild*] and counterpart of the dialectical method. If we are unable to demonstrate a general law by virtue of which one spiritual form emerges necessarily *out* of another, until finally the whole series of spiritual configurations is passed through in accordance with this principle, then it would seem that the ensemble of these configurations could be thought of only as nothing more than a self-contained cosmos. The individual forms would simply stand next to each other: their ambit could be surveyed and their particularity described, but they would no longer express a common ideal content [*Gehalt*]. The philosophy of these forms must eventually lead to their history, which, according to its objects, would present and specify itself as the history of language, the history of religion, the history of myth, the history of art, etc. Thus, at this point, a peculiar dilemma arises. If we adhere to the demand for a logical unity, the universality of the logical form ultimately threatens to blur the particularization of each individual domain and the particular nature of its principle; if we immerse ourselves in this individuality and persevere in our examination of it, we run the risk of losing ourselves and of finding no way back to the universal. A way out of this methodological dilemma can be found only if it is possible to grasp and demonstrate an element that is repeatedly found in each basic spiritual form and yet which recurs in none of them as such in the same shape [*Gestalt*]. Then, with regard to this element, we might assert the ideal *interconnection* of the individual domains – the interconnection between the basic functions of language and cognition, of the aesthetic and the religious – without losing the incomparable *particularity* of any one of them. If a medium could be found through which each configuration – as it occurs in the basic individual-spiritual tendencies – passes, while nevertheless preserving its particular nature and its specific character, then the necessary intermediary link necessary for an examination, similar to the one the transcendental critique has provided for pure *cognition*, would be established for the *totality* [*Allheit*] of spiritual forms. Thus, the next question we have to ask ourselves is whether in fact there is such a middle territory and mediating function for the manifold tendencies of
15 spirit and whether this function exhibits certain typical, basic features by virtue of which it can be recognized and described.

2. THE GENERAL FUNCTION OF SIGNS: THE PROBLEM OF SIGNIFICATION

To answer these questions, we will first return to the concept of the *symbol*, as Heinrich Hertz has postulated and denoted it from the standpoint of physical cognition. What the physicist seeks in appearances is the presentation of their necessary connection. This presentation, however, can be accomplished not only by leaving behind the immediate world of sensible impressions but ostensively by turning away from them entirely. The concepts with which the physicist operates, the concepts of space and time, of mass and force, of material point and energy, of the atom or the ether, are free "simulacra" that cognition designs to dominate the world of sensible experience and to survey it as a lawfully ordered world that directly corresponds to nothing other than itself in the sensible data. However, although no such correspondence takes place – and perhaps precisely *because* it does not take place – the conceptual world of physics is completely closed up in itself. Every single concept, every particular simulacrum and sign, resembles the articulated word of a *language* in that it is, in itself, significant, meaningful, and ordered according to fixed rules. Already in the initial inception of modern physics, already in Galileo, we find the metaphor that the "book of nature" is written in mathematical language and can be apprehended only through mathematical ciphers. And since Galileo, the entire development of exact natural science shows how, in fact, all progress in the framing of the problem and its conceptual means has gone hand in hand with the increasing refinement of its *system of signs*. A clear apprehension of the basic concepts of Galileo's mechanics was achieved only when the general logical place of these concepts was, as it were, determined and a generally valid mathematical-logical sign for them was created by the algorithm of differential calculus. And from the problems connected here with the discovery of the analysis of the infinite, Leibniz could immediately determine with clarity the general problem that is contained in the function of sign-bestowing and to raise its universal "characteristic" to a truly philosophical significance. According to the basic conviction that he held and represented, the logic of things [*Sachen*] – i.e., of the basic concepts and relations of content 16
that underpin the construction of a science, cannot be separated from the logic of signs. For the sign is no mere accidental cloak of thought

but rather its necessary and essential organ. Not only does it serve for the communication of an already-finished given product of the content of thought, but it is also an instrument, by virtue of which this content developed and by virtue of which it initially gained its full determinacy. The act of conceptual determination of a content goes hand in hand with the act of its fixation in some characteristic sign. Thus, all truly rigorous and exact thinking is sustained by the *symbolism* and *semiotics* on which it is based. Every "law" of nature assumes for our thinking the shape of a general "formula"; every formula, however, can be presented in no other way than through a connection of general signs and specific signs. Without the universal signs, as they are provided by arithmetic and algebra, no particular relation [*Relation*] of physics, no particular law of nature, would be expressible. In them, the basic principle of cognition in general is graphically manifested, as it were, in the fact that the universal can be beheld only in the particular, that the particular can be thought only with regard to the universal.

This interrelationship, however, does not remain limited to science but runs through all the other basic forms of spiritual creating. For in each case, they can bring to bear only their appropriate and proper mode of apprehension and configuration in that they equally create a specific sensible substrate for themselves. This substrate is so essential here that it sometimes appears to envelop the entire content [*Gehalt*] of signification, the real "sense" of these forms. Language would appear to be completely defined and thought of as a system of phonetic signs – the world of art and that of myth would appear to be exhausted in the world of the particular, sensibly tangible shapes that both place before us. And here, in fact, an all-embracing medium is given in which all of the most-diverse spiritual formations meet. The content [*Gehalt*] of spirit discloses itself only in its manifestation; the ideal form becomes known only in and through the ensemble of the sensible signs that serve it for its expression. If it were possible to acquire a systematic overview of the different tendencies of this mode of expression – if it were possible to show their typical and consistent features as well as their particular gradations and inner differences – then the ideal of a "universal characteristic," formulated by Leibniz for cognition, would be fulfilled for the whole of spiritual creativity. We should then possess a kind of grammar of the symbolic function as such, by which the particular expressions and idioms that we

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see before us in language and art, in myth and religion, would be comprised and in general be codetermined.

The idea of such a grammar implies a broadening of the traditional historical-doctrinal concept of idealism. This doctrinal concept has always aimed at opposing to the "*mundus sensibilis*" [sensible world] another cosmos, the "*mundus intelligibilis*" [intelligible world], and at distinguishing with confidence the boundaries between these two worlds. The boundary, however, essentially runs in such a way that the world of the intelligible was determined by the element of pure doing, whereas the world of the sensible was determined by the element of undergoing [*Leiden*]. In the former, the free spontaneity of the spiritual ruled, and in the latter, the bondage, the passivity [*Passivität*] of the sensible ruled. However, for the "universal characteristic," whose problem and task has now been set before us in its most general outline, *this* opposition is no longer immediate and exclusive. For a new form of interrelation and correlation establishes itself between the sensible and the spiritual. The metaphysical dualism seems to be bridged as long as it can be shown that precisely the pure *function* of the spiritual itself must seek its concrete fulfillment in the sensible and that in the end it is able to find it only here. In the extent of the sensible itself, a sharp difference must be made between what is mere "reaction" and what is pure "action," between what belongs to the sphere of "impression" and what to that of "expression." Dogmatic sensationalism does not see that it misjudges the significance and achievement of the purely intellectual factors, but above all, even though it proclaimed sensibility as the real basic force of spirit, it did not apprehend the whole breadth of its concept or the totality of its achievements. Dogmatic sensationalism portrays an inadequate and distorted image [*Bild*] of sensibility insofar as it limits it to the world of "impressions," to the immediate givenness of simple sensations. In so doing, it fails to appreciate that there is also an activity of sensibility itself, that, to speak with Goethe, there is also an "exact sensible imagination [*Phantasie*]"[5] that operates in the most-diverse domains of spiritual creating. In all of 18
them, alongside and above the world of perception, we find in the act a truly free *image-world* that is the true vehicle of their immanent progress: a world whose immediate constitution still completely bears the color of the sensible, a world, however, that exhibits an already-formed sensibility and therefore a sensibility already governed by spirit. It is a question

here not of something simply sensibly given and encountered but rather of a system of a sensible manifold that is created in some form [*Form*] of free forming [*Bilden*].

The process of linguistic formation thus shows, for example, how the chaos of immediate impressions is illuminated and organized [*gliedert*: articulated] for us only in that we "name" it and so permeate it with the function of linguistic thinking and expression. In this new world of linguistic signs, the world of impressions acquires an entirely new "consistent existence," because it acquires a new spiritual articulation. The differentiation and separation, the fixing of certain elements of content by speech-sounds, not only designates a determinate-spiritual quality through them but actually endows them with such a quality, by virtue of which they are now raised above the mere immediacy of so-called sensible qualities. Thus, language is one of the fundamental spiritual means by which we are able to progress from the world of mere sensation to the world of intuition and representation. It contains in embryonic form that intellectual labor that is further expressed in the formation of concepts, as scientific concept, as the determined logical unity of form. Here lies the first beginning of that general function of separation and connection that finds its highest conscious expression in the analyses and syntheses of scientific thinking. And next to the world of linguistic and conceptual signs now stands the world of figures [*Gestaltenwelt*] that are created by myth and art, incomparable with it and yet related to it in spiritual origin. For as deeply rooted as mythical imagination [*Phantasie*] is in the sensible, it is also beyond the mere passivity of the sensible. If we measure it by the customary empirical standards as it is served up by our sensible experience, then its formations [*Gebilde*] must appear as simply "unreal"; however, the spontaneity and inner freedom of the mythical function manifests itself precisely in this unreality. And this freedom in no way coincides with lawless caprice. The world of myth is no mere formation [*Gebilde*] of whim or chance but rather has its own
19 fundamental laws of forming [*Bilden*] that are effectively at work in and through each of its particular manifestations. It is, therefore, altogether clear that in the domain of artistic intuition every apprehension of an aesthetic form [*Form*] in the sensible is possible only through the fact that we produce the forming [*bildend*] of the basic elements [*Grundelemente*] of form. All understanding of spatial figures [*Gestalten*], for example, is

ultimately bound to the activity of their inner production and to the lawfulness of this production. Thus, we see without exception how the highest and purest spiritual activity known to consciousness is conditioned and mediated by determinate modes of sensible activity. Here too, we always possess the real and essential life of the pure idea only in the colorful reflection of the appearances. The system of the manifold of the manifestations of spirit is comprehensible for us in no other way than by tracing the different tendencies of its original image-force [*Bildkraft*]. In this reflection, we catch sight of the essential being of spirit – for this can present itself to us only by operating in the configuration [*Gestaltung*] of sensible material.

And indeed, it is a pure activity of spirit that is manifested in the creation of the different systems of sensible symbols, which is also expressed in the fact that all of these symbols emerge from the beginning with a certain claim to objectivity and value. They all reach beyond the circle of the merely individual consciousness of appearances, and they claim to situate them against the generally valid. This claim may possibly prove to be untenable in the light of subsequent critical-philosophical contemplation and its developed and refined concept of truth; however, in general, it belongs to the nature [*Wesen*] and character of the basic individual forms. They see their formations [*Gebilde*] not only in general as objectively valid but in most cases literally as the proper core of the objective, of the "actual." In this way, it is as characteristic of the first, so to speak, naïve and unreflective manifestations of linguistic thinking as it is of the thinking of myth that they do not clearly distinguish between the content of the "thing" [*Sache*] and the content of the "sign," but rather, both tend to merge into one another in complete indifference. The name of a thing [*Sache*] and the thing [*Sache*] itself are inseparably fused together – the mere word or image contains within itself a magical force through which the essence of the thing [*Ding*] gives itself to us. And we need only transfer this intuition from the real to the ideal, from the tangible to the functional, in fact, to discover in it a justifiable core. For in the immanent development of spirit, the acquisition of the *sign* actually forms an initial and necessary step toward the acquisition of the objective cognition of 20
essence. The sign forms for consciousness, as it were, the first stage and the first evidence of objectivity, because through it the constant flux of the contents of consciousness is for the first time halted because in it

something enduring is determined and emphasized. No mere *content* of consciousness as such recurs in strictly identical determinedness once it has passed and been replaced by others. Once it has vanished from consciousness, it is gone once and for all as that which it was. However, to this incessant alteration of the contentual [*inhaltlich*] qualities, consciousness now juxtaposes the unity of itself and the unity of its form. Its identity is truly demonstrated not in what it is or has but rather in what it does. Through the sign that is linked to a content, the content itself acquires a new, consistent existence and a new duration. For the sign, in contrast to the real alteration of the individual contents of consciousness, has a certain ideal *signification* that endures as such. It is not like the given of simple sensation, a punctual singularity and uniqueness, but rather, it stands as the representative [*Repräsentant*] of a totality [*Gesamtheit*], as an ensemble of possible contents, against which it thus presents a first "universal." In the symbolic function of consciousness, as it operates in language, art, and myth, certain constant basic gestalts that are of a partly conceptual nature as well as a purely intuitive nature are lifted out of the stream of consciousness; a self-contained and enduring unity of form takes the place of fleeting contents.

It is a question here, however, not of a merely individual act but rather of a progressive process of determination that gives the entire development of consciousness its imprint. At the first stage [*Stufe*], the fixing of the content through the linguistic sign, the mythical or artistic image, seems to do no more than hold it fast in *recollection*; it does not go beyond simple reproduction. Here the sign seems to add nothing to the content to which it refers, but only captures and repeats its simple, pure consistency. Even in the history of the psychological development of *art*, it has been thought possible to identify a phase of mere "recollective art," in which every artistic configuration worked in a single tendency that emphasized certain features of the sensually perceived and offered it to
21 recollection in a self-created image.[6] However, the more clearly the basic individual tendencies emerged in their specific energy, the more evident it likewise became that all apparent "reproduction" always has for consciousness an original and autonomous capacity for presupposition [*Leistung zur Voraussetzung*]. The reproducibility of the content is itself bound up with the production of a sign in which consciousness operates freely and independently. The concept of recollection thus acquires a richer and

deeper sense. To recollect a content, consciousness must have previously internally made it its own in another way than as mere sensation or perception. The mere repetition of the given at another point in time does not suffice; rather, in this repetition, a new kind of apprehension and forming [*Formung*] must likewise be asserted. For every "reproduction" of a content already includes a new stage [*Stufe*] of "reflection." Even though consciousness no longer takes this content as something simply present [*gegenwärtig*] but posits it for itself in an image of something past and for it yet not vanished, consciousness, by this altered *relationship* to the content, gives to itself and to the content a modified ideal *significance*. And this emerges ever-more precisely and abundantly the more the proper image-world [*Bildwelt*] of the I differentiates itself. The I now not only exerts an original activity of forming [*Bilden*] but also comes to a deeper understanding of this activity. The boundaries [*Grenzen*] of the "subjective" and "objective" worlds truly emerge clearly and sharply for the first time. It is one of the essential tasks of the general critique of cognition to demonstrate the laws according to which this delimitation [*Abgrenzung*] in the purely *theoretical* domain is accomplished with the methods of scientific thinking. This critique shows that "subjective" and "objective" being are not from the beginning strictly separate spheres of fully defined content but that both become determined only in the process of cognition and in accordance with its means and conditions. The categorical separation between "I" and "not-I" thus proves to be a consistent, effective function of theoretical thinking, whereas the manner in which this function is *fulfilled*, how the contents of "subjective" and "objective" being are delimited against one another, is different depending on the stage [*Stufe*] of cognition achieved. For the theoretical-scientific view of the world, the consistent and necessary elements [*Elemente*] of experience 22
are the "objective," whose contents are, however, awarded this consistency and on which necessity depends, on the one hand, on the general methodological standard that thinking applies to experience and, on the other hand, on the state of cognition at that time – i.e., conditioned by the totality [*Gesamtheit*] of the empirical and theoretical insights that it has secured. Seen in this context, how we apply and implement the conceptual opposition of "subjective" and "objective" in the configuration of the world of experience and in the construction of nature shows itself to be not so much the *solution* to the problem of cognition as, rather, its

perfect *expression*.[7] This opposition, however, appears in all its richness and its inner diversity only when we follow it beyond the boundaries of theoretical thinking and its specific conceptual means. Not only science but language, myth, art, and religion as well provide the building blocks from which the world of the "actual," as well as that of the spiritual, the world of the I, are constructed for us. They too are not simple *formations* [*Gebilde*] that we can insert into a given world; rather, we must comprehend them as *functions* by means of which a distinctive configuration of being and a particular division and separation takes place. Just as the means that each function employs is different, each one presupposes and applies entirely different standards and criteria, such that the result is also different. The scientific concepts of truth and reality are different from those of religion or art; thus, it is a particular and incomparable basic relationship that is not so much designated as founded between the "inner" and the "outer," between the being of the I and the being of the world. Before it can be *decided* between all of these manifold, intersecting, and conflicting views and claims, they must first be *differentiated* with critical rigor and precision. The achievement of each one must be measured by itself and not by the standards and demands of any of the others – and only at the end of this consideration can the question be raised as to whether and how all of these different forms of the apprehension of the world and of the I are compatible with one another. But if they do not portray one and the same
23 "thing" existing in itself, might they not, however, contribute to a totality and to a unified systematization of spiritual activity [*Tun*]?

For the philosophy of *language*, this way of considering things was first apprehended and carried out with full clarity by Wilhelm von Humboldt. For Humboldt, the phonetic sign that presents the material of all language formation is, in a sense, the bridge between the subjective and objective, because in it the essential elements of the two are united. For, on the one hand, the sound is spoken – i.e., brought forth and formed by ourselves; on the other hand, as a sound heard, it is a part of the sensible reality that encompasses us. We apprehend and know it as something both "inward" and "outward" – as an inward energy that expresses and objectifies itself in something outward.

> For in that in language the spiritual striving breaks open a path through the lips, the product of that striving returns to one's own ear. The

> representation is transformed into actual objectivity, without being deprived of subjectivity on that account. Only language is able to do this; and without this transformation, occurring constantly with the help of language even in silence, into an objectivity that returns to the subject, the act of the formation of the concept, and with it all true thinking, is impossible. . . . For indeed, language cannot be regarded as a material that just sits there, surveyable in its totality, or communicable little by little, but must be seen as something eternally producing itself, where the laws of production are determined, rather the scope and even to some extent the nature of the product remains totally unspecified. . . . As the individual sound stands between the object and the human, so the whole of language steps in between the human and the nature that operates, both inwardly and outwardly, upon the human. The human surrounds itself with a world of sounds, so as to assimilate and process within itself the world of objects.[8]

An element that is valid for every mode and every form of symbol-bestowing is designated in this critical-idealistic view of language. In each one of its freely projected signs, spirit apprehends the "object" by apprehending at the same time itself and the proper lawfulness of its own act of forming [*Bilden*]. And this distinctive interpenetration prepares the ground [*Boden*] for the deeper determination of subjectivity 24
as well as objectivity. On the first stage of this determination, it appears as though both opposing elements simply stand separately next to one another and over against one another. In its earliest formations, language can be grasped equally well as the pure expression of the inner or the external, as an expression of *mere* subjectivity or mere objectivity. In the former case, the speech-sound seems to signify nothing more than the sound of excitement and emotion [*Affekt*]; in the latter case, it seems to signify nothing more than the simple imitation of sound. The different speculative views that have been expressed on the "origin of language" in fact move between these two extremes, neither of which reaches the core and spiritual nature [*Wesen*] of language itself. For what language designates and brings to expression is neither one-sidedly subjective nor one-sidedly objective; rather, it effects a new mediation, a distinctive *reciprocal determination* between the two factors. Neither the mere discharge of emotion [*Affekt*] nor the repetition of objective phonetic stimuli

constitutes the characteristic sense and form of language: language arises, rather, only where the two ends are combined into one, thus creating a new, not previously given, *synthesis* of the "I" and the "world." And moreover, an analogous relation is produced in every truly independent and original tendency of consciousness. Art, too, can no more be defined and comprehended as the mere expression of the inner than as the reproduction of gestalts of external reality; rather, in it, too, the decisive and distinguishing element is to be sought in how the "subjective" and "objective," pure feeling and pure figure [*Gestalt*], merge into one another and acquire precisely in this merging a new, consistent existence and a new content. In all of these examples, we see more clearly than is possible if we limit ourselves to the purely intellectual function that in analyzing the spiritual forms we cannot *begin* with a rigid, dogmatic demarcation of the subjective over against the objective but that the delimitation and establishment of their regions are *accomplished* only through these forms. Each particular spiritual energy shares in this establishment in its particular way and consequently contributes to the constitution of the I-concept as well as the world-concept. Neither cognition nor language, myth, and art act as a mere mirror simply reflecting images of a given inward or outward existence [*Sein*] as it produced them in itself; they are
25 not indifferent media but rather the real sources of light, the conditions of seeing [*Sehen*] as well as the origins of all configuration.

3. THE PROBLEM OF "REPRESENTATION" [*REPRÄSENTATION*] AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The first problem that confronts us in the analysis of language, art, and myth is to explain how, in general, a certain sensible individual content can be made into the bearer of a general spiritual "signification." If we content ourselves with grasping only the material existence [*Bestand*] of all these domains, with describing the physical constitution of the signs that they employ, then we are led back to an ensemble of particular sensations, to simple qualities of sight, hearing, or touch as the ultimate basic elements [*Grundelemente*]. However, now the miracle occurs: through the manner in which it is considered, this simple sensible material acquires a new and multifaceted spiritual life. When the physical sound – distinguished as such only by pitch and tone, intensity and quality – is formed into

a speech-sound, it becomes the expression of the finest intellectual and emotional differences [*Differenzen*]. What it immediately is completely recedes behind what it mediately accomplishes and "means" [*besagt*]. The concrete-individual elements [*Einzelelemente*], out of which the work of art is constructed, also clearly exhibit this basic relationship. No artistic formation [*Gebilde*] can be understood as the simple *sum* of these elements [*Elemente*]; rather, in each a determinate law and a specific sense [*Sinn*] of aesthetic form-bestowing are at work. The synthesis, in which consciousness connects a sequence of tones into the unity of a melody, is obviously entirely different from the synthesis in virtue of which a manifold of speech-sounds fit together into the unity of a "sentence." They all share, however, one thing in common: in both cases, the individual-sensible details do not stand by themselves; rather, they are integrated into a conscious *whole*, from which they receive their qualitative sense.

If we attempt to set out before us an initial general overview of the totality [*Gesamtheit*] of relations by which the unity of consciousness is designated and as such constituted, then we are first led to a series of certain basic relations [*Grundrelationen*] that confront one another as distinctive and autonomous "modes" of connection. The element of "juxtaposition" [*Nebeneinander*] as it appears in the form of *space*; the element of "succession" [*Nacheinander*] as in the form of *time*; and the connection of 26
determinations of being in such a way that one is grasped as a "*thing*," the other as a "*property*," or of successive events [*Ereignissen*] in such a way that the one appears as the *cause* of the other are all examples of such original types of relation. Sensationalism attempts in vain to derive and explain them from the immediate content of individual impressions. "Five tones on a flute" may, after all, according to Hume's well-known psychological theory, "give us" the representation of time[9]; however, this result is possible only if the characteristic element of the relation and order of "succession" has already been tacitly incorporated into the content of the individual tones and with it if the general structure of time is already assumed. For psychological as well as epistemo-critical analysis, the real fundamental forms of relation show themselves in the end to be just those simple and irreducible "qualities" of consciousness as the simple sensible qualities, the elements [*Elemente*] of visual, auditory, or tactile sensation. And yet philosophical thinking cannot content itself with accepting the manifold of these relations as such, as a simple factual

state of affairs. With sensations, we may content ourselves with simply enumerating their different basic classes and arranging them before ourselves as an unconnected multitude; by contrast, what pertains to relations [*Relationen*], so it would seem, what they accomplish as individual forms of connections, comes to be grasped and understood by us only if we think of them as connected with one another through a higher mode of synthesis. Since Plato formulated this problem of the *κοινωνία τῶν γενῶν* [community of the forms] in *The Sophist*, the systematic "community" of pure ideas and form-concepts, it has remained alive throughout the history of philosophical thinking. The critical and the metaphysical-speculative solutions to this problem, however, differ in that they presuppose different concepts of the universal and hence different senses of the logical system. The former view goes back to the concept of the "analytic-universal," the latter aims at a "synthetic-universal." In one, we
27 content ourselves with combining the manifold of possible forms of connection into the highest concept of a system and, thus, *subordinating* them to determinate fundamental laws; in the other, we seek to understand how the totality [*Totalität*], the concrete totality [*Gesamtheit*] of particular forms, developed *from* a single originary-principle. If the latter point of view permits only *one* starting point and *one* endpoint – which are connected with one another by the constant application of one and the same methodical principle to a synthetic-deductive demonstration – then the other point of view not only tolerates but also calls for a plurality of different "dimensions" of consideration. It posits the problem of a unity that, from the beginning, renounces simplicity. The different modes of spiritual forming [*Formung*] are recognized as such, with no attempt at making them fit into a single, simple progressing series. And yet such a view in no way renounces an interconnection of the individual forms; rather, the idea of system is exacerbated by the fact that the concept of a complex system displaces the concept of a simple system. Each form is, so to speak, assigned to a particular plane, within which it affects and in which it unfolds its specific particular nature in complete independence; however, even in the totality [*Gesamtheit*] of these ideal modes of efficacy now emerge, at the same time, certain analogies, certain typical modes of conduct that are singled out as such and can be described.

The first element that we encounter is a difference that may be designated as the difference in the *quality* and *modality* of forms. By the "quality"

of a certain relation, we understand here the particular type of connection, by virtue of which it creates a series within the whole of consciousness, whose members are subjected to a special law of correlation. Thus, for example, "togetherness" over against "succession," the form of a simultaneous connection over against that of a successive connection, forms one such independent quality. As a result, one and the same form of relation can, however, undergo an inner transformation if it is situated within another *form of interconnection* [*Formzusammenhang*]. At the same time, each individual relation always belongs – regardless of its particularity – to a *totality* of sense [*Sinnganze*], which possesses its own "nature," its self-contained law of form. Thus, for example, the general relation [*Relation*] that we call "time" exhibits itself just as much as an element [*Element*] of theoretical-scientific *cognition* as it does as an essential element [*Moment*] in certain formations [*Gebilde*] of *aesthetic* consciousness. Time – as explained in the beginning of Newton's *Mechanics*, as the stable basis of all events 28
[*Geschehen*] and as the uniform measure of all alterations in themselves – seems, at first sight, to have nothing more than the name in common with the time that prevails in a musical artwork and its rhythmic measures. And yet this unity of naming implies a unity of signification at least insofar as the general and abstract quality is posited [*gesetzt*] in both, which is designated by the term "succession." However, there prevails in the consciousness of the laws [*Gesetzen*] of nature as the laws of the temporal form of events [*Geschehen*] and in the comprehension of the rhythmic measure of tonal formations a "mode" of succession proper to each. Analogously, we can apprehend certain spatial forms, certain complexes of lines and figures [*Figuren*], in one case as an artistic ornament and in another as a geometrical drawing, and by virtue of this apprehension bestow one and the same material with an entirely different sense. The unity of space that we construct in aesthetic vision and generating, in painting, sculpture, and architecture, belongs to a completely different stage [*Stufe*] from that which is presented in certain geometrical theorems and in a determinate form of geometrical axioms. In the one case, we have the modality of the logical-geometric concept; in the other, we have the modality of artistic spatial imagination. In the one case, space is thought of as an ensemble of mutually [*voneinander*] dependent determinations, as a system of "grounds" and "consequences"; in the other case, it is apprehended as a whole, in the dynamic interplay [*Ineinander*] of its

individual moments, as an intuitive and emotional unity. And even with this, the series of configurations that the consciousness of space passes through is not yet exhausted; for, in *mythical thinking*, a distinctive view of space is exhibited; a mode of organization and "orientation" of the world according to spatial criteria that are sharply and characteristically separated from the way the spatial organization of the cosmos is accomplished in empirical thinking.[10] Likewise, for example, the general form of "*causality*" appears in a completely different light once we consider it on the level of scientific thinking or that of mythical thinking. Myth, too, knows of the concept of causality: it employs it both in its general theogonies and cosmogonies as well as in interpreting a wealth of individual
29 appearances that it mythically "explains" on the basis of this concept. The ultimate motive of this "explanation" is, however, quite different from that which governs the cognition of causality by means of theoretical-scientific concepts. The *problem* of the origin as such is common to both science and myth; however, the type and character, the modality, of the *origin* alters as soon as we move from the one domain to the other – as soon as we grasp the *origin* not as a mythical *potency* but to use it as a scientific *principle* and come to understand it as such.

We see, then, that to characterize a determinate form of relation in its concrete application and signification, not only is the description of its qualitative constitution as such required but so is an indication of the complete system in which it stands. If we designate the different kinds of relation [*Relation*] – such as the relation of space, time, causality, etc. – as R_1, R_2, R_3 . . ., then to each one there belongs a special "index of modality," μ_1, μ_2, μ_3, indicating the functional interconnection and context of signification in which it is to be taken. For each of these contexts of signification, language as well as scientific cognition, art as well as myth, possesses its own constitutive principle that imprints its signet, as it were, on all the particular configurations within it. The result is an extraordinary manifold of form-relationships, whose richness and inner entanglements, however, can be surveyed only through a rigorous analysis of each individual total-form [*Gesamtform*]. However, even apart from this particularization, the most general consideration of the whole of consciousness already leads back to certain fundamental conditions of unity, to the conditions of connectability, those of spiritual combination [*Zusammenfassung*], and those of spiritual presentation as such. It belongs

to the nature [*Wesen*] of consciousness itself that no content can be posited in it without, through this simple act of positing, a total complex of other content being already co-posited. Kant once formulated, in his treatise on negative quantities, the problem of causality as to understand [*verstehen*] why because *something* is, at the same time *something else*, completely different ought and must be. If with dogmatic metaphysics, we take the concept of absolute *existence* as our starting point, then indeed this question must appear as ultimately insoluble. For an absolute being calls for ultimate absolute elements [*Elemente*], each of which is a substantial rigidity for itself [*für sich*] and must be comprehended for itself [*für sich*]. However, this concept of substance offers no necessary or even comprehensible transition to the multiplicity of the world, to the 30
manifoldness and diversity of its particular appearances. Even in Spinoza, the transition from substance, as that which *in se est et per se concipitur*[11] [in itself and is comprehended by itself], to the series of singular, dependent and changeable *modi* is not so much deduced as arrived at surreptitiously. Generally, metaphysics sees itself, as its history shows, ever-more clearly placed before an intellectual dilemma. Either it must conceptually take seriously the basic concept of absolute existence, in which case all relations [*Relationen*] evaporate, in which all multiplicity of space, time, and causality threatens to dissolve into mere semblance, or it must let these relations [*Beziehungen*] – in that it recognizes them as merely exterior and contingent, as "accidents" – ensue in being [*zum Sein hinzutreten lassen*]. However, metaphysics then at once encounters a peculiar setback: it becomes increasingly apparent that this same "contingency" is accessible to *cognition* and can be apprehended in its forms, while the naked "being" [*Wesen*], which should be thought of as the foundation of the particular determinations, is lost in the void of mere abstraction. What began as the "all [*All*] of reality [*Realität*]," as what should be understood as the ensemble [*Inbegriff*] of all reality [*Wirklichkeit*], proves ultimately to be something that is still only a moment of sheer determinability but contains in itself nothing more than an independent and positive determination.

This dialectic of the metaphysical theory of being can be avoided only if, from the start, "content" and "form," "element" [*Element*] and "relation," are not comprehended as independent determinations of each other but appear as given together with one another and thought of in

a reciprocal determination. More sharply in the history of thinking, the modern "subjective" turn of speculation has brought this general methodological demand increasingly to the fore. For the question assumes a new shape once it is displaced from the ground [*Boden*] of absolute being to that of consciousness. Every "simple" quality of consciousness has a determinate content [*Gehalt*] only insofar as it is, at the same time, apprehended in a thoroughgoing unity with others and in a thoroughgoing separation from others. The function of this unity and this separation cannot be removed from the content of consciousness; rather, it constitutes one of its essential conditions. Accordingly, there is not "something" in consciousness that does not *eo ipso* [by (or from) the thing itself] and
31 without further mediation give rise to "another" and to a series of others. For every single existence [*Sein*] of consciousness has its determination through the fact that in it, at the same time, the whole of consciousness is in some form co-posited and represented [*repräsentiert*]. Only in and through this *representation* [*Repräsentation*] does what we call the givenness and "*presence*" [*Präsenz*] of the content become possible. This becomes immediately evident when we consider even the simplest instance of this "presence" [*Präsenz*] – the temporal relation and the temporal "present" [*Gegenwart*]. Nothing would seem more certain than that everything that is actually, *immediately* given in consciousness refers to a single point of time, to a determined "now," and is beheld in it. The past is "no longer" present [*vorhanden*] in consciousness, and the future is "not yet" present [*vorhanden*] in it: neither seems to belong at all to its concrete reality, its true actuality; rather, they dissolve into mere intellectual abstractions. And yet, the content that we designate as the "now" is nothing other than the eternally fluid boundary dividing the past from the future. This boundary cannot be posited independently of what it bounds: it exists only in this act of division and not as something that could be thought before this act and detached from it. The individual temporal moment [*Augenblick*], insofar as it can be determined *as* temporal, can be apprehended only as the fluid transition from past to future, from the no–longer [*Nicht-Mehr*: nothing no more] to the not-yet [*Noch-Nicht*: as yet nothing], and not as static substantial existence. Where the now is different, where it is taken absolutely, it, in truth, no longer forms an element [*Element*] of time but the negation of time. The temporal movement now appears to be halted in it and as a result annihilated. For a thinking, such

as that of the Eleatic, that aims entirely at absolute being and strives to remain in it, the flying arrow *rests* – because in every indivisible "now," it belongs to [*zukommen*] only one unequivocally defined and indivisible "location." In contrast, if the temporal moment [*Moment*] is thought of as *belonging* to temporal motion, then instead of singling it out and opposing to it becoming, it should really be situated in becoming, and this is possible only in that the process as a whole is at the same time co-thought in the moment [*Moment*] as singular and in that both, moment and process, merge together for consciousness into a perfect unity. The form of time itself can in no other way be "given" for us then by illustrating the time-element [*Zeitelement*] forward and backward in the time series. If we think an individual cross-section of consciousness, we are able to apprehend it as such not by just dwelling in this cross-section, but by *going beyond* it in 32
the different directions of relation by means of certain spatial, temporal, or qualitative functions of ordering. Only because we are able in this way to hold onto a not-being [*Nicht-Seiende*] within the actual being [*Sein*] of consciousness are we able to hold onto the not-given within the given and only because of this ability does there exist for us that unity that we designate, on the one hand, as the subjective unity of consciousness and, on the other, as the objective unity of the object.

The psychological and epistemo-critical analysis of the consciousness of space leads us back to the same originary-function of representation [*Repräsentation*]. For initially, every apprehension of a spatial "whole" assumes the formation of a whole time series: even though the "simultaneous" synthesis of consciousness accounts for a real and original essential factor of consciousness, it can complete and present itself only ever on the basis of the successive synthesis. If certain elements [*Elemente*] are to be combined into a spatial whole, then they must pass through the sequence of consciousness and be related to one another in accordance with a determinate rule. Neither the sensationalist psychology of the English nor the metaphysical psychology of Herbart have been able to render comprehensible how the consciousness of spatial connection *arises* from the consciousness of temporal connection – how the consciousness of "togetherness" can form itself from a mere sequence of visual, tactile, and motor sensations, or from a complex of a simple series of representations. However, one thing is certain: despite their entirely different points of departure, these theories are consistent in

recognizing that space in its concrete configuration and organization is not "given" as a ready-made possession of the psyche [*Seele*] but comes into being only in the process of consciousness and, so to speak, in its movement as a whole. However, this very process would disintegrate for us into sheer, isolated, opposing and unrelated individual details, permitting of no combination [*Zusammenfassung*] into *one* result, if there were not, here again, the general possibility of apprehending the whole in the part [*Element*] and the part [*Element*] in the whole. Here too, the "expression of the many in the one,"[12] the *multorum in uno expressio*, as Leibniz characterized consciousness in general, proves to be decisive.
33 We attain the intuition of certain spatial *formations* [*Gebilde*] only in that, on the one hand, we combine into *one* representation the groups of sensible perceptions that mutually displace one another in immediate-sensible lived-experience and, on the other, we allow this unity to break up into the diversity of its individual components. Spatial consciousness is initially constructed in this interplay of concentration and analysis. The shape [*Gestalt*] appears as potential motion, while motion appears as potential shape [*Gestalt*].

In Berkeley's investigations into the theory of seeing [*Sehen*], which forms the starting point of modern physiological optics, he compared the development of spatial perception to the development of language. There is a kind of natural language – i.e., a fixed correlation between signs and significations – by which, according to him, spatial intuition can initially be acquired and secured. It is not that we picture [*abbilden*] a readily available tangible archetype [*Urbild*] of "absolute space" in our representation but rather that we learn to use the different, intrinsically incommensurate impressions of the manifold domains of the senses – in particular, those of sight and touch – as representatives [*Repräsentanten*] and signs for one another, that the world of space as a world of perceptions that are interrelated and systematically linked together arises for us. Berkeley has attempted here, according to his basic sensationalist's presuppositions, to understand the language of spirit, which he demonstrated to be a condition of spatial intuition, exclusively as a language of the *senses*. However, upon closer scrutiny, this approach negates itself. For it is already located in the concept of language itself that it can never be purely sensible, but rather, it exhibits a distinctive interpenetration and interaction of sensible and conceptual factors, so long as in it the

fulfillment of the individual-sensible signs is always provided with a general intellectually significant content. The same is true of every other kind of "representation" [*Repräsentation*] – the presentation of an element of consciousness in and through another. We think that the sensible foundation of the construction of the representation of space is given to us in certain visual, motor, and tactile sensations; however, the sum of these sensations contains no trace of that characteristic form of unity that we call space. Rather, this form of unity manifests itself in a kind of correlation through which each of these individual qualities can be merged into their totality [*Gesamtheit*]. In this way, we think an infinity of possible *directions* as already posited in each element [*Element*], provided that we posit it as spatial, and the ensemble of these directions constitutes 34
the whole of spatial intuition. The spatial "image" that we possess of an individual empirical object – of a house, for example – comes about only in that we extend an individual, relatively limited perspectival view in this way, in that we employ it only as a starting point and suggestion in order to construct from it a complex whole of spatial relations [*Relationen*]. In this way, space is understood less as a static vessel and container into which ready-made "things" enter than as exhibiting an ensemble of ideal functions that mutually complement and determine one another into [*zu*] the unity of a result. Just as earlier and later as the fundamental directions of temporal progress were already expressed in the simple "now" of time, so too are a "there" and an "over-there" as already posited in every "here." The individual isolated position is not given before the system of positions; rather, it is given only in respect of it and in a correlative relation to it.

A third form of unity, which is raised above spatial and temporal unity, is the form of the *objectifying connection*. When we join together an ensemble of determinate properties into [*zu*] the whole of a stable thing with multifarious and varying characteristic traits, then this combination presupposes the connection in juxtaposition and succession, without, however, merging into it. The relative constant must be distinguished from the variable; certain spatial configurations [*Konfigurationen*] must be apprehended before the concept of the thing, as the constant "bearer" of the variable properties, can form itself. However, the thought of this "bearer" adds a characteristic new element of independent significance to the intuition of spatial togetherness and temporal succession. The empiricist's analysis

of cognition has, of course, always repeatedly attempted to deny this independence. It sees in the thought of the thing nothing other than a purely external form of connection; it attempts to show that the content and form of the "object" are exhausted in the sum of its properties. However, the same basic lacuna that adheres to the empiricist's dissection of the I-concept and I-consciousness immediately becomes apparent. When Hume explains the I as a "bundle of perceptions,"[13] this explanation – which, even though it retains in it the fact of combination *in general*, says
35 nothing whatsoever about the *particular* form and type of synthesis into [*zu*] the I – distinguishes itself because in the concept of perception, the concept of the I, which apparently should have been analyzed and disassembled [*zerlegt*] into its components, is included still completely reassembled [*unzerlegt*]. What makes the individual perception a perception, what distinguishes it, for example, as a quality of "representation" of any thing-quality, is precisely its "belonging to [*zu*] the I." This "belonging to [*zu*] the I" does not originate in the subsequent combination [*Zusammenfassung*] of a plurality of perceptions but is already initially inherent in each individual perception. A completely analogous relationship exists in the connection of manifold "properties" into [*zu*] the unity of a "thing." When we combine the sensations of extension, sweetness, roughness, and whiteness into the representation of "sugar" as a unified tangible whole, then this is possible only insofar as each individual one of these qualities is originally thought as determined in reference to this whole. The fact that whiteness or sweetness or any of the rest is not apprehended merely as a state in me but rather as a "property," as an objective quality, already completely includes in itself the sought-after function and perspective of the "thing." Thus, a basic general schema already prevails here in the positing of the individual, which, then, in the ongoing experience of the "thing" and its "properties" is filled with ever-new concrete content. Just as the point, as a simple and individual location, is possible only "in" space (i.e., logically speaking under the presupposition of a *system* of all determinations of location) – just as the thought of the temporal "now" can be determined only in regard to a *series* of moments and to the order and sequence of succession that we call "time" – the same, therefore, also applies to the relationship of things and properties. In all these relationships, whose closer determination and analysis [*Zergliederung*] is an object [*Sache*] of a specialized theory

of cognition, the same basic character of consciousness displays itself: the whole here is not first extracted from the parts, but rather, every positing of a part already includes in itself the positing of the whole, not its content but its general structure and form. Every individual already originally belongs here to a determinate *complex* and brings the rule of this complex itself to expression. The totality [*Gesamtheit*] of these rules, however, constitutes the true unity of consciousness, as a unity of time, space, objective connection, etc.

The traditional psychological concept of language scarcely features an entirely appropriate expression for the designation of these states of affairs because only recently, in its transition into the modern "gestalt 36
psychology," has psychology torn itself away from the presuppositions of the basic view of sensationalism. For the latter, which resolves all objectivity into "simple" impression, every connection consists in nothing more than mere combination [*Zusammenfassung*], in the "association" of impressions. This term is broad enough to uniformly encompass every possible relation that exists in consciousness; however, at the same time, by its very breadth, it renders its particularity and particular nature unrecognizable. Relations of the most diverse quality and modality are indiscriminately designated by it. "Association" means the combination of elements [*Elemente*] into the unity of time or the unity of space, into the unity of the I or the object, into the whole of a thing or of a sequence of events [*Ereignissen*] – into a series whose members are combined through the standpoint of cause and effect and as such through the standpoint of "means" and "end." "Association" also passes as an adequate expression of the *logical* law of linking individuals into the comprehensible unity of *cognition*, as, for example, the forms of configuration that prove effective in the construction of *aesthetic* consciousness. However, it now emerges that this concept designates at best only the naked fact of combination in general, without revealing anything whatsoever about its specific mode and rule. As a result of this, the diversity of paths and directions by which consciousness arrives at its syntheses is totally concealed. If we designate the "elements" [*Elemente*] as a, b, c, d, etc., there is, as we have seen, a precisely graduated and intrinsically differentiated system of manifold functions $F(a, b)$, $\Psi(c, d)$, etc. in which their connection declares itself but that in the allegedly generic concept of association is not so much brought to expression as, on the contrary, made to vanish because it

brings about a leveling down. And there is still another essential lacuna that adheres to this designation. As closely as the contents connect, and as intimately as they "fuse" together with one another, the contents that can occur in association with each other remain *separable* in terms of their sense and origins. In the progress of experience, the contents are joined together into increasingly stable associations and groups; however, their consistent existence as such is not initially given through the group, but rather, it is already given prior to it. And yet this relationship of the "part" to the "whole" is principally overcome in the genuine syntheses of consciousness. In this genuine synthesis of consciousness, the whole does not *originate* [*entsteht*] from the parts, but rather, it *constitutes* them and gives them their essential signification. Thus, as has been shown, when
37 we think of any limited segment of space, the tendency of the whole of space is co-posited with it; in every individual temporal moment [*Augenblick*], the general form of succession is co-posited with it; and the positing of any particular property grasps the general relationship between "substance" and "accident" and thus the characteristic thing-form in itself. It is, however, this very interpenetration, this intensive "being-conditioned-through-one-another" that association, as an expression of a mere togetherness of representations, leaves unexplained. The empirical rules for the mere flow of representations that it sets up fail to render intelligible the specific basic formations [*Gebilde*] and basic figures [*Gestalten*] in which the representations band together and the unity of "sense" that arises between them.

The rationalist's theory of cognition set out to recover and demonstrate the independence of this "sense." One of the essential historical merits of this theory is that by virtue of one and the same intellectual turn, it has established a new and deeper view of consciousness in general and a new concept of the "object" of cognition. It confirmed Descartes' dictum that the unity of the objective, the unity of substance, could not be apprehended in perception, but only in the reflection of the mind [*Geist*] on itself, in *inspectio mentis* [inspection of the mind]. The basic theory of rationalism stands in the sharpest opposition to the empiricist theory of "associations" – and yet here too, the inner tension between two fundamentally different essential elements [*Elemente*] of consciousness, between its mere "matter" and its pure "form," are not sublated. For the ground for the *connection* of the contents of consciousness is also sought in an activity that in

some way approaches the individual contents from the outside. According to Descartes, the "ideas" of outward perception, the ideas of lightness and darkness, roughness and smoothness, colored and sonorous, are in and for themselves only pictures [*Bilder*] in us (*velut picturae*) and, in this sense, are merely subjective states [*Zuständlichkeiten*]. What leads us beyond this stage, what enables us to progress from the manifold and variability of impressions to the unity and constancy of the object is the function of judgment and "unconscious inference," which is entirely independent of these impressions. The objective unity is a purely formal unity that, as such, can neither be heard nor seen but rather can be apprehended only in the logical process of pure thinking. Descartes' *metaphysical* dualism is ultimately rooted in his *methodological* dualism: the theory of the absolute division between the extended substance and the thinking substance is only a 38
metaphysical expression for an opposition that is already discernible in the presentation of the pure function of consciousness itself. And even with Kant, in the beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, this opposition between sensibility and thinking, between the basic "material" and "formal" determinations of consciousness, is retained in its old, undiminished force, although here the idea immediately arises that perhaps the two may be interconnected in a common root unknown to us. However, the principal objection to this formulation of the problem shows that the contraposition expressed in it is a product of abstraction, whereas the unity of the matter and form of consciousness, of the "particular" and the "universal," of the sensible "elements of givenness" and the pure "elements of order," constitutes precisely originally certain and originally known *phenomenon*; the logical estimation and evaluation of individual factors must be based on the *analysis* of each element of consciousness. If we wished to make this state of affairs clear with a mathematical simile and allegory – though, of course, it goes beyond the boundaries of the mathematical – we might, in opposition to mere "association," choose the term "integration." The element of consciousness [*Bewußtseinselement*] is to the whole of consciousness not as an extensive part to a sum of parts but as a differential to its integral. Just as the differential equation of movement expresses its course and its general law, we must think of the general structural laws of consciousness as already given with each of its elements [*Elemente*], in any of its cross-sections – not given with, in the sense of real and independent contents but in the sense of tendencies and directions that are already inherent in

the sensible individual. Every "existence" in consciousness consists precisely in the fact, and only in the fact, that it immediately goes out beyond itself in such a different direction of synthesis. Just as the consciousness of the moment [*Augenblick*] already includes in itself the pointing to the time series and the consciousness of a single spatial position already includes in itself the pointing to "the" space as the ensemble and allness [*Allheit*] of every possible determination of location, there prevail in general many relations through which the form of the whole is expressed in the consciousness of individuals. The "integral" of consciousness is constructed not from the sum of its sensible elements [*Elemente*] (a, b, c, d. . .), but from the totality [*Gesamtheit*], as it were, of its differential relation and differential form (dr_1, dr_2, dr_3 . . .). The full actuality of consciousness unfolds
39 only what was already included as "potency" and as a general possibility in each of its separate elements. With this, we obtain the most general critical solution for Kant's question as to how it is thinkable that because "something" is, something "other," totally different from it, must also be. The relationship, which inevitably seemed more and more paradoxical the more sharply it was examined and analyzed from the standpoint of absolute being, becomes necessary and immediately intelligible when it is looked at from the standpoint of consciousness. For here, there is not from the beginning an abstract "one" that confronts an equally abstract separated and detached "other"; but rather, here the one is "in" the many, just as the many is "in" the one: in the sense that each reciprocally conditions and reciprocally represents [*repräsentieren*] the other.

4. THE IDEAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SIGN: OVERCOMING THE PICTURE THEORY [*ABBILDTHEORIE*]

The previous considerations set out to give a kind of epistemo-critical "deduction"; a grounding and justification of the concept of representation [*Repräsentation*], inasmuch as representation, the presentation of one content in and through another, should be recognized as an essential prerequisite for the construction of consciousness itself and as a condition of its inherent formal unity. The following study, however, will not be directed toward this general logical significance of the representative function. The problem of the sign will be pursued not backward to its ultimate "grounds" but forward to its concrete unfolding and configuration

[*Ausgestaltung*], which it undergoes in the manifold of the different cultural domains. For this treatment, a new foundation must now be established. We must go back to "natural" symbolism, to that presentation of the whole of consciousness that is necessarily contained or at least inherent in every individual element and fragment of consciousness, if we want to comprehend the artificial symbols, the "arbitrary" signs that consciousness creates in language, art, and myth. The force and achievement of these mediating signs would remain a mystery if they did not have their ultimate root in an original spiritual process that is grounded in the nature [*Wesen*] of consciousness. That a sensible individual, such as the physical sound of speech, can be the bearer of a purely spiritual significance can ultimately be intelligible only if the basic function of signifying itself is already present and effective [*vorhanden und wirksam*] before the positing of individual signs, so that they are not first created in this positing but only fixed and applied to an individual case. Because every separate content of consciousness is situated in a network of manifold relations, by virtue of which, in its simple being and self-presentation, it also includes in itself a *pointing to* other and still-other contents, there can and must be certain formations [*Gebilde*] of consciousness in which the pure form of pointing to is, as it were, sensibly embodied. Hence the distinctive dual nature of these formations [*Gebilde*]: their dependence on the sensible, however, also includes in itself a freedom from the sensible. In every linguistic "sign," in every mythical or artistic "image," a spiritual content [*Gehalt*], which in and for itself points beyond everything sensible, is transformed into the form of the sensible, into something visible, audible, or tangible. An independent mode of configuration emerges, a specific activity of consciousness, which is differentiated from the givenness of all immediate sensation and perception but which makes use of this very givenness as a vehicle, as a means of expression. This "natural" symbolism, which we have found inherent in the basic character of consciousness, is, on the one hand, utilized and retained and, on the other hand, surpassed and refined. For in this "natural" symbolism, there is always a certain *component* of consciousness that, though lifted out from the whole, nevertheless retains the force to represent [*vertreten*] this whole and through this representation [*Vertretung*], in a certain sense, reestablishes it. An available content possessed the capacity to make present not only itself but, at the same time, another content not

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immediately given but given only through its mediation. The symbolic signs that we encounter in language, myth, and art, however, "are" not first and then, beyond this being, acquire a determinate signification; rather, their being first arises out of signification. Their content [*Gehalt*] merges purely and completely into the function of signifying. Here consciousness, to apprehend the whole in the individual, no longer depends on the stimulus of the individual, which must be given as such; rather, here consciousness *creates* the determinate concrete-sensible contents as an expression for a determinate complex of signification. Because these contents, as self-created contents, are also entirely in the forceful power of consciousness, so it is able, through them, to also "evoke" freely, as designating the expression of all those significances anew. When, for
41 example, we link a given intuition or representation [*Vorstellung*] with an arbitrary linguistic sound, initially we seem to have added almost nothing to its proper content. And yet upon closer scrutiny, in this creation of the linguistic sign, the content also assumes a new "character" for consciousness because it receives a new determination. Its sharp and clear spiritual "reproduction" proves to be literally bound to the act of linguistic "production." For the task of language is not merely to *repeat* determinations and differences that are already present in the representation [*Vorstellung*] but also to posit them as such and render them recognizable. And so in every sphere, through the freedom of spiritual doing, the chaos of sensible impressions initially begins to clear up and to assume for us a fixed gestalt. The fluid impression acquires form and duration for us only through a *forming* confrontation [*bildend gegenübertreten*] in some tendency of sign-bestowing. In science and language, in art and myth, this transformation into the gestalt is accomplished in different ways and according to different principles of formation; however, they all correspond in that which ultimately stands before us as the product of their activity [*Tun*], which in no way resembles the mere *material* with which they initially began. Thus, in the basic function of the sign-bestowing in general and in its different tendencies, spiritual consciousness first truly distinguishes itself from sensible consciousness. The passive abandonment [*Hingegebenheit*] to some outer existence is replaced by an independent imprinting that we give it and by which it separates for us into different regions and forms of reality. Myth and art, language and science, are, in this sense, imprintings *toward* [*zu*] being: they are not simple pictures

[*Abbilder*] of an available [*vorhanden*] reality but present [*darstellen*] the main directions of spiritual movement, the ideal process in which reality is constituted [*konstituiert*] for us as one and many – as a manifold of configurations that are ultimately held together by a unity of signification.

Only if we look ahead to this goal does the *particular* determination of the different systems of signs and the use that consciousness makes of them become intelligible. If signs were nothing more than a repetition of a determinate, in itself finished, individual content of intuition or representation, then it would be unclear both what would be accomplished by a mere copy [*Kopie*] of something available [*Vorhanden*] and how, strictly speaking, such a copy should be achieved. For it is obvious that an imitation can never approach the original, can never replace it 42
for spiritual contemplation. From the presupposition of such a norm, we are necessarily led to an attitude of fundamental skepticism toward the value of the sign in general. If, for example, we considered it as the true and essential task of language to once again only bring to expression in the foreign medium of speech-sounds the very reality that we have before us already complete in individual sensations and intuition, then it can immediately be seen how infinitely far from this task every language must be. Compared to the unlimited abundance and multifariousness of intuitive reality, all linguistic symbols must appear as empty; compared to their individual determination, they must seem abstract and vague. In the moment [*Augenblick*] in which language attempts to enter into rivalry with sensation or intuition in *this* respect, its impuissance must appear unmistakable. The *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* [first falsehood] of the skeptical critique of language is precisely that it assumed this standard as the only valid and possible one. In truth, however, the analysis of language – in particular, if we start not from the mere individual details of words but from the unity of the *sentence* – shows every linguistic expression to be far removed from a mere impression of the given worlds of sensation or intuition and contains in itself, rather, a determinate independent character of sense-bestowing. And the same relationship applies to signs of the most diverse type and origin [*Herkunft*]. In a certain sense, it can be said of them all that their value consists not so much in what they retain of the individual concrete-sensible content and its immediate consistent existence as in what in this immediate consistent existence they suppress and abandon. The artistic drawing becomes what it is and distinguishes

itself from a purely mechanistic reproduction, only through what it omits from the "given" impression. It is not the reproduction of this "given" impression in its sensible totality but rather the singling out of determinate "pregnant" elements – i.e., elements through which the given is amplified beyond itself and through which the artistic-constructive, synthetic *spatial imagination* [*Raumphantasie*] is conducted in a determinate direction. What constitutes the real force of the sign, here as in other domains, is thus precisely that as the immediate, determinate contents recede, the general element of form and relation [*Relation*] attain ever-sharper and ever-purer expression [*Ausprägung*]. The individual as such is apparently delimited; however, this is precisely so that the achievement that we have designated as "the integration into the whole" is accomplished more determinately and more forcefully. It has already
43 been shown that every individual of consciousness "exists" only in that it potentially includes in itself the whole and, as it were, is comprehended in constant transition into the whole. The use of the sign, however, initially liberates this potentiality for true actuality. Indeed, *one* blow now strikes a thousand connections that resonate more or less forcefully and clearly in every positing of the sign. In this positing, consciousness disengages more and more from the direct *substrate* of sensation and sensible intuition; however, precisely therein it demonstrates more resolutely that inherent, original force of connection and unification.

Perhaps this tendency emerges most clearly where it is manifested in the function of the *scientific* systems of signs. The abstract chemical "formula," for example, which is used as the designation of a determinate material stuff, contains nothing of what direct observation and sensible perception teaches us about this material stuff; however, instead, it places the particular body in an extraordinarily rich and finely structured complex of relations, of which perception as such knows nothing. It no longer designates the body according to what it sensibly "is" and according to what it immediately gives to us sensibly but grasps it as an ensemble of further possible "reactions," of further possible causal interconnections that are determined by general rules. The totality [*Gesamtheit*] of these lawful connections coalesces with the expression of the individual in the chemical formula, and through this, this expression obtains an absolutely new characteristic imprint. As in other cases, the sign serves here to create a mediation for the transition from the mere

"matter" of consciousness to its spiritual "form." Precisely because it arises without its own sensible mass, because it, so to speak, floats in the pure ether of signification, it has the ability to bring to exposition the entire complex totality of movements of consciousness rather than just its individual details. It is not the reflection of a fixed consistent existence of consciousness but the guideline of such movement. Thus, the physical substance of the word of language is accordingly only a mere breath of air; however, in this breath prevails an extraordinary force for the dynamic of representation and thoughts. This dynamic is intensified as much as it is regulated by the sign. Already the Leibnizian design of the "*characteristica generalis*" [general characteristic] emphasizes the fact that an essential and general advantage of the sign is that it serves not only the presentation but, above all, the *discovery* of certain logical interconnections – that it not only serves as a symbolic abbreviation for the already known but opens new paths into the unknown, non-given. With each concentration of its content [*Gehalt*] that it achieves, which at the same time expands its existing boundaries, the synthetic force of consciousness in general is proven from a new angle. The combination [*Zusammenfassung*], which is given in the sign, not only grants us a mere retrospective but at the same time allows for a new prospective. It posits a relative closure, which, however, immediately contains a challenge to advance further and free the way for this further advancement by making evident its general rule. In particular, the history of science offers the most-diverse evidence for this state of affairs – it shows how significant it was for the solution of a certain problem or complex of problems when it was possible to convey them in a clear and fixed "formula." Thus, for example, most of the questions, which found their solution in Newton's concept of fluxion and in Leibniz' algorithm of differential calculus, were around before Leibniz and Newton and had been tackled from the most diverse directions – from the angles of algebraic analysis, geometry, and mechanics. All of these problems were truly manageable, however, only once a consistent and comprehensive symbolic *expression* had been obtained for them: with this, they no longer formed a loose and fortuitous sequence of merely individual questions; rather, the common principle of their origin was designated in a determinate, generally applicable *method*, in a basic operation whose rules were established.

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The presentation and mediation of an opposition that is given and grounded in the simple concept of consciousness itself are, thus, found in the symbolic function of consciousness. All consciousness displays itself to us in the form of temporal events [*Geschehen*], but amid these events [*Geschehen*], certain realms of "gestalts" are lifted out. The element of constant alteration and the element of duration tend to transition into each other and merge into one another [*ineinander aufgehen*]. This general demand is fulfilled in different ways in the formations [*Gebilde*] of language, myth, and art and in the intellectual symbols of science. All of these formations [*Gebilde*] appear, as it were, to immediately belong to the living, constantly renewed process of consciousness, and yet at the same time, there prevails in them the spiritual striving to obtain fixed points or resting places in this process. Thus, consciousness retains in them a character of continuous flow; however, it does not lapse into the indeterminate but structures itself around fixed centers of form and signification. Each such form, in accordance with its pure "in-itself" [*Ansich*] as a *αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτό* [itself by itself] in the Platonic sense, is lifted out of the flow of the mere course of representations, but at the same time, to appear at all and to acquire an existence "for us," it must be represented [*repräsentiert*] in some way in this flow. In the creation and use of the different groups and systems of symbolic signs, both conditions are fulfilled, insofar as here an individual-sensible content, without ceasing to be such, in fact acquires the force to depict a general validity for consciousness. Here, therefore, the sensationalist axiom "*nihil est in intellectu, quod non antea fuerit in sensu*"[14] [nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses] loses its validity as well as its intellectual inversion. For it is no longer a question of whether the "sensible" precedes or follows the "spiritual" but of the revelation and manifestation [*Äußerung*] of basic spiritual functions in the material of the sensible itself. Looked at from this standpoint, what appears as the one-sidedness of abstract "empiricism," as well as the one-sidedness of abstract "idealism," is precisely that this basic relationship is not developed in either to full clarity. On the *one* hand, a concept of the given and individual is established without it being recognized that all such concepts must, explicitly or implicitly, always already contain in themselves the element and determination of something universal, but on the *other* hand, the validity and necessity of these determinations in general are asserted without designating the medium by virtue of which

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alone they are able to present themselves in the psychological givenness of consciousness. If, by contrast, we begin from the concrete foundational form of life rather than from abstract postulates, then this dualistic opposition seems sublated. The semblance of an original separation between the intelligible and the sensible, between the "idea" and the "appearance," vanishes. Of course, we still remain caught up here in a world of "images"; however, it is not a question of images that reproduce some in itself consistently existing world of "things" [*Sachen*] but of image-worlds whose principle and origin are to be sought in an autonomous creation of spirit. Through them alone do we catch sight of what we call "reality," and in them alone do we possess it: the highest objective truth 46
that is accessible to spirit is ultimately the form of its own activity [*Tun*]. In the totality [*Totalität*] of its own achievements and in the cognition of the specific rule, by which each of them is determined, as well as in the consciousness of the interconnection that combines all of these particular rules into the unity of *one* task and one solution – in all this – spirit possesses the intuition of itself and that of reality. As for the question, however, as to what absolute actuality is beyond the totality [*Gesamtheit*] of these spiritual functions, as to what the "thing in itself" might in *this* sense be, this question, of course, cannot be answered except to say that we learn more and more to recognize it as an ill-formed problem, as a hallucination [*Trugbild*] of thinking. The true concept of reality [*Realität*] cannot be squeezed into the mere abstract form of being; rather, it arises in the multiplicity and abundance of the forms of spiritual *life*, but such a life that is imprinted by the stamp of inner necessity and thereby the stamp of objectivity. In this sense, to speak with Goethe, each new "symbolic form" – not only the conceptual world of cognition but also the intuitive world of art, as well as that of myth or language – signifies a revelation issuing from the inner to the outer, a "synthesis of world and spirit,"[15] which first truly assures us of the original unity of the two.

At the same time, new light is cast on one final fundamental opposition, with which modern philosophy has always struggled from its initial beginnings and which it has formulated with increasing sharpness. The "subjective" turn that took place in modern philosophy led it more and more to center the totality [*Gesamtheit*] of its problems in the *concept* of *life* rather than in the unity of the concept of being. However, even though this seemed to appease the opposition of subjectivity and

objectivity in the form in which it appeared in dogmatic ontology and seemed to initiate its ultimate reconciliation, now, in the ambit of life itself, a still more radical opposition emerged. The truth of life seems to be given nowhere else than in its pure *immediacy* and seems to be enclosed in it; however, all comprehending [*Begreifen*] and all apprehending [*Erfassen*] of life seems to threaten and sublate this very immediacy. Of course, if we start from the dogmatic concept of being, then here too, the dualism of being and thinking becomes more and more pronounced as we advance in our reflections; however, there nevertheless appears to
47 linger the possibility and the hope that the image [*Bild*], which projects [*entwirft*] the cognition of being, will hold onto at least a remnant of the truth of being. It would seem as if being did not enter into this image of cognition fully and adequately but only with a *part* of itself, as it reaches over with its own substance into that of cognition, in order to produce in it a more or less faithful reflection of itself. The pure immediacy of life, however, admits of no such separation and decomposition. It can, it seems, be seen wholly or not at all; it does not enter into mediated presentations that we attempt of it, but it continues to stand as a fundamentally other beyond them as their opposition. The original content [*Gehalt*] of life cannot be apprehended in any form of *representation* [*Repräsentation*]; rather, it can be apprehended only in pure *intuition* [*Intuition*]. It would seem, therefore, that every view of the spiritual must choose between these two extremes. The decision must be made as to whether we seek the substantial of spirit in its pure originality *precedes* all mediated configurations – or whether we abandon ourselves to the abundance and diversity of these very mediations. Only in the former view do we seem to touch on the actual and genuine kernel of life, which, however, appears as an absolutely simple, in itself enclosed kernel; whereas in the latter view, we allow the entire spectacle [*Schauspiel*] of the development of spirit to pass by before us. But the deeper we immerse ourselves in it, the more clearly it dissolves into a mere spectacle [*Schauspiel*], into a reflected picture [*Abbild*] possessing no independent truth or essential being. The gulf between these two oppositions – it would seem – is never bridged by any effort of mediating thinking, which itself remains entirely on *one* side of the opposition: the further we progress in the direction of the symbolic, the merely significative [*Signifikative*], the more we separate ourselves from the originary-ground of pure intuition [*Intuition*].

Not only has philosophical *mysticism* repeatedly stood before this problem and this dilemma, but the pure logic of idealism has repeatedly and most vehemently apprehended and designated it. Plato's statements in his *Seventh Letter* concerning the relationship of the "idea" to the "sign" and the necessary inadequacy between the one and the other strike a motif that will continue to recur in all sorts of variations. In Leibniz' method of cognition, "intuitive [*intuitive*] cognition" is separated from merely "symbolic" cognition by a sharp cut. Even for the author of the *characteristica universalis*, all cognition through mere symbols sinks down to the level of "blind cognition" (*cogitatio caeca*) when compared to intuition [*Intuition*], as pure 48
vision [*Schau*], as the actual "sight" [*Sicht*] of the idea.[16] *Human* cognition can nowhere dispense with images and signs; however, it is thus precisely as human – i.e., characterized as delimited and finite – that it stands opposite the ideal of the perfect, archetypal, and divine understanding. And even Kant, who has assigned this ideal its precise logical place by determining it as a mere boundary concept of cognition, and who believed that in so doing he had critically come to terms with it – even Kant, in a passage that constitutes the purely methodological climax of the *Critique of Judgment*, once again works out in a fundamentally incisive way the opposition between the "*intellectus archetypus*" and the "*intellectus ectypus*," between intuitive, archetypal understanding and discursive understanding "in need of images."[17] From the standpoint of this opposition, it would seem necessary to show that the richer the *symbolic content* [*Gehalt*] of cognition, or of any other spiritual form, becomes, the more its *essential content* [*Gehalt*] must wither away. The abundance of images does not designate but rather conceals and veils the imageless-One, which stands behind them and at which, albeit unsuccessfully, they aim. Only the sublation of all figurative [*bildlich*] determination, only a returning to the "nothing but nothing,"[18] as it is called in the language of mysticism, can lead us back to the real originary and essential ground. From a different perspective, this very opposition presents itself as a conflict and as a constant tension between "culture" and "life." For the necessary fate of culture is that everything it creates in its constant process of configuration and "formation" progressively distances us from the originality of life. The more richly and more energetically spirit is active in forming, the further this very doing seems to remove it from the originary-source of its own being. It shows itself more and more entangled in its own creations – in the words of language, in the images of

myth or art, in the intellectual symbols of cognition – which are like a delicate and transparent but nevertheless unbreachable veil. The actual
49 and most profound task of a *philosophy* of culture, a philosophy of language, cognition, myth, etc., seems to consist, however, precisely in raising this veil – in penetrating the mediating sphere of mere signifying and designating back once more into the original, intuitive looking [*intuitiven Schauen*]. However, the specific, and only, distinctive *organ* at the disposal of philosophy conflicts with this task. For philosophy, which finds its fulfillment only in the sharpness of the concept and in the brightness and clarity of "discursive" thinking, the paradise of mysticism, the paradise of pure immediacy, is closed. As a consequence, there is no other way out for philosophy here than to reverse the *direction* of consideration. Rather than to retrace the path,[19] it must seek a way forward to its completion. If all culture proves effective in the creation of certain spiritual image-worlds, of certain symbolic forms, then the aim of philosophy is not to go behind all of these creations but rather to understand and to make conscious their basic forming [*gestaltend*] principle. The content [*Gehalt*] of life rises up to its true form only in this consciousness. Life emerges out of the sphere of purely natural given existence: it remains, however, no more a part of this existence than a mere biological process, but rather, it transforms and accomplishes itself toward the form of "spirit." Thus, instead of apprehending the content [*Gehalt*] of life, the negation of the symbolic forms would, in fact, destroy the spiritual form with which this content [*Gehalt*] necessarily proves to be bound for us. If we take this the other way around – i.e., if we no longer pursue the ideal of a passive vision of spiritual realities but rather situate ourselves amid their activity [*Aktivität*] – if we apprehend them not as the static contemplation of a being [*Seiende*] but as the functions and energies of forming [*Bilden*], then in this forming [*Bilden*], as different and dissimilar as the *gestalts* [*Gestalten*] arising from it may be, we may extract certain common and typical basic features of *configuration* [*Gestaltung*]. If the philosophy of culture succeeds in apprehending and making visible such basic features, then it has thus fulfilled, in a new sense, its task of demonstrating the unity of the *nature* [*Wesen*] of spirit as opposed to the multiplicity of its *manifestations*; for this nature [*Wesen*] shows itself most clearly in the fact that the manifold of its *products* does not affect the unity of its *producing* but rather, to the contrary, proves and confirms it.

ENDNOTES

1 Cf. especially Plato, *The Sophists*, 243Cff.

2 This is discussed in greater detail in my book *Zur Einsteinschen Relativitätstheorie* (Berlin: B. Cassirer, 1920); cf. especially the first section on "Maßbegriffe und Dingbegriffe." [Ernst Cassirer, *Substance and Function and Einstein's Theory of Relativity* (Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1923), chap. 1, "Concepts of Measure and Concepts of Things," 361–366.]

3 Heinrich Hertz, *Die Prinzipien der Mechanik in neuem Zusammenhange dargestellt* (Leipzig: F. A. Barth, 1894), xff. [Heinrich Hertz, *The Principles of Mechanics*, trans. D. E. Jones and J. T. Walley (New York, NY: Macmillan and Co., 1899), 1.]

4 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xi.

5 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Ernst Stiedenroths Psychologie zur Erklärung der Seelenerscheinungen," in *Werke*, ed. by order of the Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen: *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1893), vol. XI, 73–77: 75.

6 Cf. Wilhelm Wundt, "Die Kunst," in *Völkerpsychologie. Eine Untersuchung der Entwicklungsgesetze von Mythus, Sprache und Sitte* (2nd ed., Leipzig: Engelmann, 1904), vol. 3, 115ff.

7 For a more detailed treatment, see my book *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* (Berlin: B. Cassirer, 1910), chap. 6. [Cassirer, *Substance and Function and Einstein's Theory of Relatiity*.]

8 Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Einleitung zum Kawi-Werk," in *Werke*, ed. Albert Leitzmann, *Gesammelte Schriften*, *Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. 7, no. I, 55ff. See *Über die Kawi-Sprache auf der Insel Java* (3 vols. Berlin, 1836–39), vol. I, "Einleitung." [Humboldt, *On Language* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 56, 58, 62.]

9 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, book 1, part 2, section III: Of the Other Qualities of Our Idea of Space and Time.

10 Cf. my study *Die Begriffsform im Mythischen Denken*, vol. 1 (Studien der Bibliothek Warburg) (Leipzig und Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1922). [Ernst Cassirer, "The Form of the Concept in Mythical Thinking (1922)," in *The Warburg Years (1919–1933 – Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, trans. S. G. Lofts with A. Calcagno (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 1–71.)]

11 Baruch de Spinoza, *Ethics*, I, Def. 3.

12 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Specimen inventorum de admirandis naturae generalis arcanis," in *Philosophische Schriften*, vol. 7, ed. Carl Immanuel Gerhardt (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875–1890), 309–318: 317.

13 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (book I, part 4, section 6).

14 See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (book III, chapter 1, section 5).

15 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Über Naturwissenschaft im Allgemeinen, einzelne Betrachtungen und Aphorismen," in *Werke*, vol. XI, 103–163: 128.

16 Cf. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Meditationes de cognitione, veritate et ideis," *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, vol. 4, 422ff.
17 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 5: 408.
18 [Angelus Silesius: – "Gott ist ein lauter Nichts, ihn ruhrt kein Nun noch Hier; Je mehr du nach ihm greiffst, je mehr entwind er dir."]
19 ["den Weg zurückzutun" cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xiv.]

Volume 1

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I

THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY[1]

1. THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHICAL IDEALISM (PLATO, DESCARTES, LEIBNIZ)

The philosophical question about the origin and nature [*Wesen*] of *language* is basically as old as the question about the origin and nature [*Wesen*] of *being*. For what characterizes the initial conscious reflection on the whole of the world is that for it language and being, word and sense, have not yet been separated from each other but rather appeared to it as an indivisible unity. Because language is a prerequisite and condition of reflection, because philosophical "awareness" [*Besonnenheit*] is awakened only in and through language, the initial mindfulness of spirit, thus, also always already finds language present as a given reality [*Realität*], as a "reality" [*Wirklichkeit*] that is physically commensurable and on par with it. The world of language surrounds the human in the moment [*Augenblick*] in which the human first directed its regard [*Blick*] toward it with the same determinateness and necessity, the same "objectivity," as does the world of things that confronts it. Like the world of things,

language stands before the human as a whole, which possesses its own nature [*Wesen*] and its own entirely individual discretion disconnected
52 from bonds. No more than the constitution of things or the immediate constitution of their sensible impressions, the being and significance of words do not return, at this initial stage of contemplation, to the free activity of spirit. The word is not a designation and denomination, nor a spiritual symbol of being; rather, it is a very real part of being. The mythical intuition of language, which always precedes philosophical intuition, is consistently characterized by this indifference of word and thing [*Sache*]. For it, the being [*Wesen*] of each thing [*Sache*] is decided in its name. The magical effects are attached immediately to the word and its possession. Whoever seizes possession of the name and knows how to use it has acquired power over the object – has made it their own with all its forces. All word and name magic is based on this presupposition that the world of things and the world of names is a single reality, because it is a single undifferentiated context of effective action. It is the same form of substantiality and causality that takes effect in each of them and that connects them into a self-contained whole.

This distinctive "wholeness" [*Ganzheit*] of the mythical worldview, this sublation of every particularization of things into a mythical-magical circle of effective action, possesses as well, then, a significant consequence for the apprehension of language. As soon as myth rises above the stage [*Stufe*] of the most primitive magical "praxis" – which strives to bring about a *particular* effect through the application of a *particular* means [*Mittel*], which thus links one individual with another individual in immediate activity [*unmittelbar Tun*] –, as soon as it seeks, even in the crudest and most imperfect form, to *understand* its own activity [*Tun*], it has already penetrated to a new sphere of universality. As a *form of cognition*, the tendency [*Zug*] toward unity is as essential to it as it is to every other form of cognition. If the essential being and forces of spirit in which myth lives are to be *controllable* by human activity [*Tun*], then they must already exhibit in themselves certain constant *determinations*. Thus, the first immediately sensual and practical constraint that the human exerts on the environmental things of nature contains the germ for the thought of a theoretical necessity intrinsically prevailing in them. The more mythical thought advances, the more the individual daemonic forces cease to be mere individual forces, mere "gods of the moment" or "special gods" –

and the more a kind of superordination and subordination, a hierarchical organization manifests itself between them. The mythical view of language sets out in the same direction, though it progressively raises from 53
the intuition of the particular force that is contained in the individual word and in the individual magical formula to the thought of a general potency that the word as such and "speech" as a whole possess. The concept of *language as unity* is initially comprehended of in this mythical form. This thought recurs with characteristic uniformity in the earliest religious speculation of the most disparate regions. For the Vedic religion, the spiritual force of the word forms one of the basic motives from which it sprung: it is through the use of the sacred word that the knowing one [*Wissende*], the priest, makes himself lord over all being, over gods and humans. In the Rigveda, the lord of the word is already identified with Soma, the all-nourishing force, and designated as the one who commands with power over everything. For eternal and imperishable speech [*Rede*], the celestial Vāc, grounds human speech, which comes into being and passes away. "I go," says this heavenly speech in a hymn,

> with the Vasus, with the Rudras, with the Adityas and the All-gods. . . . I am the queen, the assembler of treasures, the wise, the first of the worshipful ones. In manifold places did the Gods divide me, who dwell in many abodes, causing me to penetrate many regions. Through me, he eats food who perceives, who breathes, who hears what is spoken. . . . I blow forth even as the wind, reaching all beings, beyond heaven, beyond this earth. Such have I become through my greatness.[2]

At first sight, the concept of logos, as it first takes shape in Greek speculation, seems to be closely twinned with this mythical view of the dignity and omnipotence of the heavenly word. For here too, the word is eternal and imperishable; here too, the unity and consistent existence of beings in general is traced back to the unity and indestructibility of the word. Thus, logos is for Heraclitus the "ruler of all."[3] Like the cos- 54
mos that it governs, logos was created neither by god nor by humans; rather, it always was, is, and will be. However, at the heart of the language of myth, which Heraclitus still speaks, an entirely new tone is now discernible. For the first time in full consciousness and lucidity, the basic philosophical-speculative thought of the uniform and indivisible

lawfulness of the all [*All*] confronts the mythical view of worldly events [*Geschehen*]. The world is no longer the plaything of daemonic powers who govern it according to their whim and caprice; rather, it is subject to an absolutely general rule that binds all individual being [*Sein*] and all individual events [*Geschehen*], assigning them their unchanging measure. "The sun will not transgress his measures; otherwise the Furies, ministers of Justice, will find him out."[4] And it is now this one intrinsically immutable law of the cosmos that is expressed in different forms and yet intrinsically the same in the world of nature as it is in the world of language. "The wise is one, to know the intelligent plan by which all things are steered through all – *ἕν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, ὁτέη ἐκυβέρνησε πάντα διὰ πάντων*."[5] With this, the magic-mythical context of force has now been transformed into a context of sense. However, this is not, of course, accessible to us as long as we continue to apprehend the one being as separated and fragmentary, as shattered into a multiplicity of particular "things," rather than to look (*anschauen*) at and apprehend it as a living whole. Language also unites both views: depending on how we look at it, we find expressed only an accidental and particular view of being, or we find a truly speculative and general view of being. If we consider the logos of language only in the form in which it is presented and reflected in the individual *word*, it thus appears, on the contrary, that every word delimits the object that it intends to designate and falsifies it in this delimitation. Through the fixation in the word, the content is lifted out of the continuous stream of becoming in which it stands; hence, it is not apprehended according to its totality but only presented according to a one-sided determination. If we want to advance to a deeper cognition of the true nature [*Wesen*] of the thing, there remains for us no other way
55 than to once again sublate this one-sided determination into another, so as to confront every word that grasps in itself an individual concept with the opposition of this very concept. And it can indeed be seen in the whole of language that every signification is bound to its opposite, every sense [*Sinn*] to its counter-sense [*Gegensinn*], and unified with it into an adequate expression of being. The spiritual synthesis, the unification that takes place in the word, resembles the harmony of the cosmos and expresses it in that it is a "counter-striving": *παλίντροπος ἁρμονίη ὅκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης* [It is a backward-turning attunement like that of bow and lyre].[6] And here, we encounter the basic law of the all [*All*]